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THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS

IN THE

REIGN OF LOUIS XV.

BY
Lamington, Alexander Dundas Ross (J)isbert Cochrane - Ba
ALEXANDER BAILLIE COCHRANE, M.P. 15/6/17

IN ONE VOLUME.

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PREFACE.

THE following letter was received by the Lord Mayor of London, from the Secretary of the Comédie Française, soon after the terrible disaster of the "Princess Alice."

"My Lord,

"A disaster has fallen upon a portion of the population of London. A subscription-list has been opened by your Lordship in aid of the necessitous families who have been the victims of this catastrophe. The Sociétaires of the Comédie Française, retaining an appreciative recollection of the assistance which was rendered to them in 1871, hasten to add their

tribute to the subscription. And I am directed by them to remit their offering into your Lordship's hands. I beg you, therefore, in their name, to receive the enclosed ; and


I am, my Lord, your most obedient servant,

“ EMILE PERRIN, Administrateur-Général ;

“ E. GOT, J. DELAUNAY. MAUBANT, C. COQUELIN,
FRÉDÉRIC FEBVRE, G. WORMS, CH. THIRON, TALBOT,
les Sociétaires-Membres du Comité d'Adminis-
tration de la Comédie Française.”

Since the receipt of the above it has been announced that the Company will, next season, be permitted to give a series of performances in London.

Those who enjoyed the privilege of attending their representations in 1871, when this distinguished Society took refuge in our country from the turmoils of their own, will entertain a grateful appreciation of this permission which has been granted by the French Government. The magnificent Farewell Banquet in the Crystal Palace offered them on the last occasion, marked the



high consideration in which they were held by the most distinguished personages in the realm. It was a just tribute to the important place which the Théâtre Français fills in public opinion, and to the wisdom of the State in maintaining, by large subsidies, such a high standard of Dramatic Art.

I have for some time had by me notes relating to the History of the Théâtre Français. These are connected by a slight narrative in this volume, which, in anticipation of this visit, may not be wholly devoid of interest.

The question of the expediency of State support to the Stage has been recently commanding public attention. And when we see the important position of the Théâtre Français, and the great influence which it exercises, we may fairly consider, whether if our Government gave State aid to one theatre on condition of its maintaining the highest standard of Dramatic Art, and of conduct and management, it might not lead to the general elevation of the Drama throughout the country, thus rendering it

an important agent in the education of the people.

I shall be well satisfied if this volume should aid in directing public attention to this important social question.

THE THÉÂTRE FRANÇAIS.

CHAPTER I.

WE picture Old Paris, the Paris of the eighteenth century, when the city was so rich in all its traditions, in its great historical associations. Tortuous and sinuous at that date were the windings of the streets and lanes; no wide Boulevards marked the divisions of the city—it was the Paris of curved, and not of straight lines, where the historian, the painter, and the archæologist found subjects of interest at every turn; it was the city associated with the history of France; the city of the League, of the Fronde, of the Guises, of the Medici, of the Valois; and aptly did it represent the

genius of the nation, and the mind of the people; so irregular, so incomplete, so full of surprises, in many things deficient, but always picturesque. In those days its contrasts, its lights and shades, were more marked than they are even now, when luxury has so much increased. In all great cities the palace and the hovel, the wide space gladdened with sunshine, and the dark fetid alley, splendour and squalor are ever found in painful proximity; but in no city were these contrasts so strong as in Paris at that period, for the Renaissance had burst forth and erected edifices beautiful in their forms and proportions; while the new taste failed to touch the squalid dwellings of the poorer classes, these crept up to the Tuileries, the grandest memorial of Catharine de' Medici, they might be seen from that square where Louis XIV. invited the chivalry of Europe to witness a tournament unrivalled in its magnificence; they looked down on those bright gardens unsurpassed in their beauty which Le Nôtre, at his master's command, had called into existence, on the spot which re-

cently had teemed with penury and wretchedness ; narrow streets or rather lanes, and dirt encumbered spaces had to be traversed, before the courtiers, in all their pomp and splendour, could reach the palace to dazzle and shine in the most brilliant of courts. Henri IV., and Louis XIII., vied with each other in the embellishment of certain parts of the city, the Great Cardinal added the Palais Royal to the numbers of the splendid palaces, which were not less remarkable for their beauty of detail than for their grandeur of design : and yet Paris at this time was rather a collection of small towns of different styles and ages than a city built with any unity of plan. Louis XIV. might publish edicts to the authorities of the different districts commanding them to improve the degraded condition of the people, but little or nothing was done towards the attainment of that object ; notwithstanding the Court itself suffered from the wretched condition of many of the most important thoroughfares ; it was only at intervals that two carriages could pass each other in the

streets, and in this city, which paved only for the aristocracy, pedestrians, when the unwieldy gorgeous carriages rolled by, had to retreat for safety under a *porte-cochère*, or were bespattered with mud as they stepped from stone to stone, which answered the purpose of pavement; but true to the cheerful Bohemian nature of these true children of Paris, unrespected and uncared for, all this discomfort, amid the confusion which arose from the warning shouts of the drivers and the cries of the crowd, their narrow escapes from being run over, seldom led to irritation. If the horses, prancing and curvetting, drove the pedestrians against the sharp angle of a wall, or into a dirty narrow doorway, still there was a certain pleasure in looking at a coachman so magnificent in his scarlet and gold. The exuberant vanity of a nation which rises superior to all disaster, and which defies all criticism, was gratified by a dazzling splendour such as no other capital could show, and by the grandeur of the monarchy which had made Paris the centre of European civilization; and

thus it was that, amid all their sufferings and all the abuses which prevailed, the people were proud of the Court and the glories of the Grand Monarque; of a race of kings the descendants of Saint Louis, and the more so as at this time Louis XV. preferred “sa bonne ville de Paris” to the dull magnificence of Versailles, or the loneliness of Saint-Germain.

One day, however, the good temper of the people was too severely tested. There was a young girl who every morning took up her station at the gate of the Tuileries, which leads out of the great Court into what is now the Rue Rivoli; she was well known and much cared for in the neighbourhood, not alone for her own merits, but because she was said to be cruelly treated by an unjust stepmother; she was singularly fair, and possessed a grace which seemed to raise her far above the class to which she belonged. The bloom had deserted her cheek, but the expression from its gentleness won the regard of all, and appealed to the heart, for “a sweet face is a silent advocate.”

She was known as the graceful little flower-girl—and her occupation was an appropriate one, for she was as pale as the lilies which she tied together. Many a hard-working man would take a flower and put a sou into the basket, feeling amply rewarded by her smile of grateful recognition; gay courtiers and graceful ladies knew the little Sophie, and frequently stopped to purchase a bouquet. There the world's poor child sat day after day, frequently faint and weary, but happy to escape from the dullness of her garret, or still more from the harsh treatment of her hard-hearted step-mother; but in her loneliness—the loneliness of a crowd—sad thoughts would sweep across her mind when life seemed to her, as it seems to many, a strange enigma. She was powerless to reason, she could only feel the contrast between her own existence and that of the brilliant beings who dashed fairy-like through the gateway of the Palace. Her destiny seemed to be cast in the darkness instead of the daylight of existence, painful indeed for one so young to

feel the spring-time of her life passing away with none of the sense of enjoyment which is youth's most precious inheritance, and when these thoughts struck her heart, the flowers would sometimes be moistened with tears instead of dewdrops.

One morning a great crowd collected around the Tuileries to see the King leave the Palace for an excursion to Versailles; it was a moment of severe distress, bread was dear, and even then cries were raised from time to time against the *fermiers-généraux*; the streets were crowded, and among the mass were some men with low, moody, gloomy countenances, the precursors of those who were hereafter to have such a terrible influence on public events. The *cortége* was preceded by the advanced guard, who cleared the street, and was followed by the lumbering state-carriage of the Marquis de Villemars, first gentleman of the chamber. As the leaders were passing Sophie, one of them kicked over the trace and then reared; the coachman rose from his seat, and handled

his whip so wildly that the lash struck one of the crowd, who vented his anger in invectives, and seizing a stick from a bystander aimed a blow at the coachman, but hit the near wheeler, which sprang forward, slipped on the pavement, and fell against the wall, knocking down Sophie, who gave a cry and then lay motionless.

The indignation of the crowd burst forth in vehement cries, and it was not until the Marquis de Villemars, with a grand courtesy, in which the French noblesse were never deficient, addressed a few words to them that they were appeased, and with cries of "Vive le Roi !" were ready to turn their anger against the offender who had struck the blow. The traces were cut, and the horse raised, while strong arms lifted Sophie ; her face was colourless, the long fair hair had escaped from its net and fell over her shoulders. She was strikingly interesting in this repose, one flower she still held in her hand, the remaining contents of her basket had been scattered and

trodden down. The Marquis did not notice or paid no attention to the little group at the corner. The harness was hastily mended, and the carriage rolled on. The detachment of the *garde de corps* that followed was commanded by the young Count d'Andore; he had witnessed the accident, and as he passed the corner he reined in his horse to look at the young girl, who was in the arms of one of these rough men, and whose voice had quite a tender pathos in it, when, in answer to the Count's inquiries, he replied, "It is la petite Sophie, the flower-girl, who lives close by in the Rue de la Grille, I fear she is killed by that gold-laced coachman. Ah, Monsieur," he added, "if all the great men were like you, there would not be so many sad hearts in Paris." For the Count had placed some money in the man's hand, charging him to take every care of her, and to call at the main-guard in the afternoon to report her condition; he was to ask for the Count d'Andore, and, "Now my friends," he said, "clear the way for the

escort, I hear by the trumpets that His Majesty has left, and I must gallop to the front."

"Oui, Monsieur Le Comte." "Vive le Roi!" the crowd exclaimed, for all hearts, even the rudest, are touched by sympathies and gracious deeds, and kind words possess a marvellous efficacy for good. Moreover, the appearance of the Count was greatly in his favour, a loyal heart beamed in every feature. "Voilà un brave et beau!" exclaimed a voice from the crowd. He possessed that winning manner which flows from the depth of the heart, he sat his horse with all the grace of the *haute école*. The glittering helmet and shining cuirass, with the gay trappings of the charger, completed the charm; and it was with one expression of admiration that the crowd fell back and enabled the Count to resume his place at the head of the escort.

The Rue de la Grille, so called from a long, low, melancholy building, situated at the end of the street, and which had evidently at one time served as a house of detention, passed behind the stately buildings which, at that

date, were situated on the quays. Here the art of the Renaissance, under the patronage of the last of the Medici, had sprung into life with all its lavish ornamentation. Some of the façades of the buildings even defied the northern climate, and brilliant frescoes rivalled those of Venice and Verona.* It was a melancholy change from the gay scene by the fast flowing river

* There were some magnificent hotels close to the Louvre; there was one especially which attracted universal interest and admiration; it was that of the Constable, Monseigneur Louis de Bourbon, which was situated next Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. It still, in the reign of Louis XV., bore the traces of the decree fulminated against the Constable; the beautiful sculptured arms had been partially destroyed and mutilated, the cornices and doors had been publicly bedaubed with yellow by the executioner, which is the sign of high treason, and the marks of this colour still remained, while over the entrance was sculptured, as if in bitter irony, the proud motto, "Espérance." André de Chesné says, "Espérance écrite en grosses lettres sur son portail, pour l'espoir je pense qu'un roi devait de son estoc naître en

to the Rue de la Grille, a street of gabled gloomy houses, some of them so tall that the sun but rarely relieved the shadows which they cast on the opposite walls, and yet it contained one or two buildings not altogether destitute of pretension, and which could boast of historic associations, but they were so time-

la France, et qu'il unirait les deux hôtels en un, aussi bien que les deux maisons. C'est ce grand Roi qui a ôté la bande de leurs, pour jouir du pur écu des Fleurs de Lys." This palace contained a magnificent hall which rivalled any in the Louvre, where royalty frequently consented to hold high festival. Sauval, who died in 1670, gives a description of it. " Sans contredit c'est la plus large, la plus longue de tout le royaume, et la couverture si rehaussée que le comble paraît aussi élevé que ceux des édifices de Saint-Germain et de Saint-Eustache, et enfin ce qui a été cause que sous Louis XIII. un lieu si vaste et si voisin du Louvre fut choisi pour la représentation des bals, ballets, et autres magnificences de son mariage. Louis XIV. s'en est servi jusqu'à nos jours pour ses ballets, et pour la comédie."—*Sauval, "Antiquités de Paris."*

worn that few would have cared to explore the labyrinths of their apartments. The class which occupied the first floors of these houses were of a rank which would surprise us at the present day; but after the first floor, in the upper stories, the inhabitants were of a humbler grade; they contained the varied classes of the lower orders. The long-suffering, the dissolute; the thrifty, the reckless; the lonely one, and the crowded family were residing side by side in these apartments; the endless variety of contrasts of Parisian life might here be studied in all its phases. And it was in one of these garrets that the little flower-girl dwelt.

"Here is the house," said the few people accompanying the man who carried her in his arms. And they stopped at one of the better class of buildings. "Her step-mother is the portière; here, Madame Guérin, is poor little Sophie, she has met with a bad accident," and the man entered the porter's lodge, laying the child tenderly on the bed.

“Where is Madame?” the man said, “like every *concierge* never to be found!”

“And what is that to you?” replied a harsh grating voice. “I have enough to do in this house without waiting here all day to have my room reeking with your bad tobacco. What is all this trouble about? why is this miserable child here instead of being in her garret? get up,” she said, as she drew near the truckle-bed.

A man, called Marcel, seized the virago by the arm as she was approaching the bed, and the woman, strong and passionate as she was, could not escape from his grasp.

“Look here, Madame Guérin,” he exclaimed, “your husband was kind to me when I was a lad. He never did a worse job for himself and his child than when he married you, leaving his money for her support in your power. Everyone in the whole quarter has heard of your bad treatment of her, how she has been driven into the street to sell flowers in the most piteous weather. When the storm


was bitter, and the wind icy cold; how she is beaten if she does not bring back any money; it is you who are the cause of her lying here. The world's poor child she has become; but even our cold bad hearts love her, the poor little Sophie—send for a surgeon, show that you have one spark of feeling in your nature.”

The woman's hard evil glance was fixed on Marcel, and there was danger in her look. “Go for a surgeon yourself, you have chosen to bring the brat here when she should have been taken to a hospital; let those who caused the accident suffer the penalty, what have I to do with another woman's child? little enough was left to keep her, it was a bad day for me when I married her father. I should have had enough to make others pull the *cordon* for me, whereas all day, and even all night, it is ‘*cordon*, if you please;’ if I did please, I would lock them all out, but this child gives me more trouble than all the other *locataires*. And now she will be my ruin with her doctors,”

and then followed a number of adjurations such as an ill-tempered *concierge* can alone command.


Marcel was about to reply in no pleasant mood, when a soft and gentle voice was heard. "I hope, Madame Guérin, you do not include me among those who give so much trouble," and the kindness, gentleness of the tone at once soothed even the virulent woman. "La voix c'est la fleur de la beauté;" what nameless power is there in the simplest words that flow from the heart!

It was Madame Denain, who occupied the first floor, and was therefore a person of great importance to the *concierge*; and she possessed qualities which endeared her not only to the residents in the house, but also to the district; she was truly a sister of charity not only to the poor in their necessities and sorrows, but also in some measure at times to their faults. "Dites-moi toujours le chemin par où la faute a passée," was her expression; there was in her heart a deep fountain of sympathy, it has been



well said that we love those on whom we confer benefits, for interest grows into anxiety for their welfare, and anxiety is blended with affection; she often sought to conquer errors by looking away from them, it was human love tolerating even intolerance; this self-denying nature is less rare than may be imagined, and we meet with it in places where it is least expected, "like a milk-white swan in an ordinary village lake." It was certainly not to have been looked for in a quarter like that of the Rue de la Grille. Madame Denain had long passed the age when men commended her for her beauty, but she possessed the charm described by Savonarola which grows with years, "Plus les créatures s'approchent de la beauté de Dieu, plus elles sont belles, et de deux femmes la meilleure excitera le plus d'admiration;" all the neighbours, rude as they were, had learnt to appreciate her excellence, even Madame Guérin had frequently listened with respectful attention to her expostulations as to the treatment of her step-daughter. It is true they had little practical effect,


still it was something to touch the callous heart even for a moment ; but Madame Guérin could not change her evil nature, any more than others can change habits after they have become inveterate. As well expect a leafless tree on the barren waste, with its branches bent towards the south by the blast of the cold north wind, again to raise its top rich with foliage, as expect the kindliness and wealth of nature to return to the wasted heart ; frequently after Madame Denain's entreaties, reproaches, and even blows, had not been spared for the helpless child, and but for the gravity of the occasion such would have been the case at present, but Madame Guérin had one great quality, even in her fits of rage, her passions were controlled by her selfish interest. And thus it was that when Madame Denain offered to take charge of Sophie, to see her carried to her room and to pay for the doctor, she saw it would be a mode of ridding herself of a great responsibility ; so Marcel took the suffering girl in his arms, and, followed by Madame Denain, carried her up the narrow stair that led



to the cinquième, not without many kind offers of assistance from the various occupants of the different stories, for the poor are ever kind to the poor, and Sophie was the *enfant chérie* of the whole house.

CHAPTER II.

ON the fifth floor were two rooms opposite each other; both belonged to Madame Guérin, but she found it more convenient to sleep in the lodge than to pay for a substitute. The one room was filled with whatever property she possessed, the other had been grudgingly allotted to Sophie; it certainly was not much for the daughter to have inherited, the only merit it possessed was one for which it was indebted to its height. From its narrow window the view of Paris was beautiful; churches, palaces, gilded domes and tapering spires might be seen glorious in their architecture; glimpses of the Seine were



caught as it wound by wide quay and busy mart; it was Sophie's sole enjoyment to gaze on the star-spangled sky, or on the storm-driven clouds when they overspread the city. Her mind, when at night she watched the heavens, seemed relieved from the bondage of the daily drudgery, from the din and worry of the street; but alas! from her views of brighter skies and dreams of happier days, she had to return to the daily struggle of life. Her nature rose upwards and onwards into Heaven's expanse, but, after bird-like soaring high, how many, like the flower-girl, have to drop to earth again; in every life there must be a great disproportion between the hope, the expectation, and the fulfilment, for our acts are ever smaller than our wishes; but it is in cases such as Sophie's that the difference between the heart's desires and the want and the void of existence becomes intensely painful; it seems so sad to find this contrast when youth is just budding into life, and that life a pure and true one, and still more sad when purity and truth have

to contend against the cruelty and falseness of age.

Sophie's room, although small and poor, afforded evidence that she possessed refined and graceful tastes; it was natural that one whose daily life it was to sell flowers should love them for their own sake, and a taste for flowers is the cheapest and most prized luxury of the poor. It is one of the civilizing agents England owes to the continent; it was the Flemish refugees, under the persecution of Alva, who introduced into this country the love of gardens, and numerous flowers hitherto unknown; and their houses in the suburbs of all our great manufacturing cities were at once distinguished by the flowers which were placed on the window-sills; in no way is Heaven's goodness more manifested than in the flowers which are lavished on every clime, and if we disregard them, it is only because they are so common. It has been well said, if any man could have invented a rose, no reward would have been considered sufficient for him, and yet we fill vases with roses, and with indifference contem-




plate their beauty ; this, however, was not the case with Sophie, flowers were her friends, and their brightness relieved the coldness of the scant furniture of the room. Above a vase full of lilies of the valley, was a small crucifix well placed near the lilies of the field :

“ Sweet nurslings of the vernal skies,
Bathed in soft air, and fed with dew.”

In one corner was the uncurtained bed, and by its side a table with a book of prayers, lying open. Poor as the room appeared, it was neat and clean ; it was the first time Madame Denain had entered it, and it added to her interest in the little sufferer.

What noise and disturbance had failed to effect, stillness and repose accomplished—Sophie awoke from her swoon.

“ Where am I ? where are my flowers ? ” she murmured ; “ if they are lost I shall be scolded by maman. And I am in such pain.”

“ Your maman will not scold you, *ma petite*,” said Madame Denain, “ only let the doctor

examine where you feel pain; you have had a severe accident, my child, but will soon get well, and we will take great care of you."

"I am so happy if you tell me I shall not be scolded; and the pain is not more than I feel sometimes after I am beaten, if I don't bring home enough money."

"Do not be afraid, my child," said Dr. Philippe, "I will not add to your pain," and gently and tenderly he examined her side; her lips quivered, her hands were clasped together during the examination, but she did not utter any cry.

Dr. Philippe was well known in the neighbourhood for his attention to the poorer classes; he felt more heart in his work among them than when he frequented the aristocratic quarters of the Faubourg. He, like Madame Denain, was struck by Sophie's appearance, and he had heard enough below to know that here was a case in which there was a heart as well as a body to be healed.

"Madame Denain, I am happy to say there


is no great injury. Nothing which rest and quiet cannot cure without the aid of a doctor. You must lie still, my child, be perfectly quiet, and, in a few days, you will be well again. Meanwhile, I will send you something to relieve the pain and put you to sleep."

"But I shall be punished if I am idle, and do not sell my flowers," said poor Sophie.

Madame Denain whispered to the doctor, and then said: "No one shall punish you, my child. I will speak to your maman, and will myself take charge of you for the present, so make yourself quite happy, and be at rest. I will return in a short time, and hope to find you asleep," and she left the room with Doctor Philippe.

A strange feeling came over the child when she was alone. It was the first time she had heard the accents of love and tenderness. Her life had been so hard a one, that she regarded a life of harshness and cruelty as a natural normal state; and now when she was spoken to with kindness, a new world of thought was opened

to her; it seemed as if she was drawn nearer to that blue sky of which she could catch a glimpse from her bed through the half-open window. That anyone should care for her was so unusual. Notwithstanding the pain she suffered, an indefinable sense of happiness, she had never felt before, came over her, and filled her eyes with grateful tears; the garret, where benevolence had entered, wore a brighter appearance; the bird in its cage, hung outside the window, sang more blithely; the flowers gave forth a sweeter perfume. And all this change from unrest to peace, from cloud to sunshine, because a true woman, faithful to woman's mission in life, had breathed the word of Hope. And truly this power of conferring blessings, if we did but realize it, is one common to us all. It belongs not to any grade of society, or to any age—there exists not a man, woman, or child who does not possess the gift of sympathy. A power which can shed light on the life of others is the possession of the humblest as of the highest. It is the expression of Love in its noblest sense



—of Eros, not of Anteros—of that Love which Hesiod says, “is the soother and softener of life, that relaxes the weary limbs;” not of that which Ugo Foscolo is picturing, when he writes “amore che quanti gioji permette è manda pianti.” Not Love represented by wingless Psyche mourning over the irretrievable past; but that Love which lives, and moves, and has its being in the happiness of others; that “records injuries in dust—kindnesses in marble;” that finds its life and energy in Renunciation, conscious that without sacrifice there is no Sacrament; there are more *Sœurs de Charité* even among the gay and brilliant of society than we are aware of. Hearts are truer and warmer than cynicism chooses to acknowledge :

“ Like diamonds blazing in the mine,
They fear in open day to shine.”

Many people are more ashamed of doing good than of doing evil. Madame Denain was not one of these; kindness was in her a habit, it never occupied her mind what people thought

of her, or whether her conduct won approval or censure. When she returned in a short time to Sophie's room, she found her in a peaceful slumber; but she awoke at the sound of a foot on the stair, which she thought was her step-mother's, and covered her face with her hands, saying, "Forgive me, maman!"

Madame Denain calmed her with the assurance that by the Doctor's orders her step-mother was on no account to enter the room. And Sophie was happy. She told Madame Denain that she had dreamed of a procession, of the crowd, and the brilliant escort, and the young officer who commanded it; then the scene had changed to the gloomy room of the *concierge*, and she shuddered as she dwelt on the sad memories it recalled. "I feel so quiet, peaceful now," she added, "that I hope I shall remain as I am."


"No, dear Sophie," said Madame Denain, "you must get well, and do not make yourself uneasy about the future, that I will try to render pleasanter for you than the past. We shall see,

fears are frequently airy voices whispering harm, where harm is not. Many tremble anticipating evils which will never befall them, and bewail what they are never to lose. You have found a friend in me, Sophie; and you have still a better friend, of whom you read in this volume, who will never desert you."

She observed that Sophie was fatigued, and again going to sleep; she then smoothed her pillow and gazed on her sweet child-like countenance with deep interest; what was to be the future of this young girl—would her mind grow in beauty and intelligence? would time destroy, lower, or elevate? Here, at any rate, was a new and deep interest for one who, like Madame Denain, was childless; here was a heart in which might be engraved noble thoughts; she hoped it might be her charge for the future to guide, protect, and lead her to happiness through excellence.

CHAPTER III.

CONVALESCENCE is the reward of illness and suffering, and Sophie enjoyed the repose and peace to which she had so long been a stranger. Madame Denain and Dr. Philippe were untiring in their attention to her, and found in her looks of gratitude their sufficient recompense. They brought her fresh flowers and books, which were to her a novelty, and afforded her constant enjoyment, and the new world of imagination burst upon her mind, which had hitherto been entirely occupied with the miseries of her daily life. At times, when she was tired, Madame Denain



would read to her or tell her incidents in her own life. She owned a small property in Provence, the garden of roses and of France; she knew that country well, and Sophie listened with enraptured interest to her stories of that land so rich in all its associations—the fountain-head of all poetry and romance, the delight of the troubadours. Provence afforded a wide field for many a conversation. At one time the subject was the history of the great Camisard chief Cavalier, who defied the power of the Grand Monarque, and won the admiration of the great marshals opposed to him, whose exploits were the glory of the wild mountain district the Cevennes, *le désert*, as the people called it, for it seemed to reconcile itself with their assumed name of *les enfants de Dieu*. In thus recalling her recollections and following the course of the rapid Rhone, town after town was a theme for many a descriptive tale. Arles, rich in the ancient remains of its former greatness, with the amphitheatre, that noble memorial of the days when the Roman legions occupied the

whole of the South of France, and the Latin race overshadowed the world. Long did they delay at Avignon with its grand palace, the abode of the Papal Court in the seventh century. She told her the history of Rienzi, the last of the tribunes, who was a prisoner in the dungeons of the castle, and whose life was saved by the influence of Petrarch. Here was the theme which Sophie was never tired of listening to, and Madame Denain was well fitted to talk upon it; she was an excellent Italian scholar, and Petrarch was her favourite poet. Frequently had she made the pilgrimage to the Fountain of Vaucluse, whose beauty and solitude filled the heart of the young poet, even before he met Laura, whose name he has associated with his immortality of fame,

“ Chiare, fresche e dolci acque.”

Madame Denain repeated many of the sonnets which depict the mind of the young poet rippling in its cadence like the Sorgues as it rolls over its mossy bed and sparkling pebbles. All this was a

new source of ideas to Sophie, and she thought how happy it would be some day to visit these beautiful countries, and read books so full of interest.

It was after one of these conversations that the doctor pronounced Sophie convalescent, and that she would soon be able to go about as usual. The poor girl was little elated at this decision; she thought her dream of happiness had been dreamt, and that the bitterness of her life was to recommence, and the colour again deserted her cheeks; but her mind was soon relieved when Madame Denain told her that she was not to sell flowers any more, but was to stay with her for the future, and that in a few days she would be moved to her apartment. Sophie protested that she was afraid of becoming a burden to her, but Madame Denain explained that she had once a dearly-loved daughter who died in her youth, and that Sophie would fill up the void left in her home.

“And Maman—” said Sophie.

“Has given her consent, dear child;” she

did not proceed to explain that she had actually been purchased from her step-mother, who, when Madame Denain, proposed to adopt Sophie, suddenly discovered the admirable merits of the little flower-girl; she calculated how much Sophie brought back every evening, and expatiated on the grace and beauty of the vendor, which added greatly to the value of the flowers, and many evil thoughts passed through the bad woman's mind to which she did not dare give expression; her need was great, but her greed was greater; she was the worst type of a class among whom exists a terrible destroyer of all natural affection, Want! Suffering in many instances is wholesome discipline; but in others it is more enervating to the soul than the most exuberant prosperity; it is very sad when these struggles with the world harden the heart, when all sense of love and gentleness, all appreciation of purity and excellence, cease to exist. It cannot be doubted that Madame Guérin was quite indifferent to the welfare of her step-daughter; thus by Madame Denain's kind intervention, for a certain sum

paid down, and a small pension settled upon her, Sophie was free.

The next day was Sunday, and Madame Denain proposed to Sophie to take her to mass at Notre Dame, and afterwards to show her a small house at St. Germain, which she had recently purchased. and which she intended to make her future residence. When Sophie was informed of this plan she could scarcely close her eyes from excitement; for the first time in her life she, who had never been beyond the Place Louis XV., was to drive into the country. It was July, and the Sunday dawned warm and cloudless—a real Parisian Sunday, when the sky seems, like the population, to beam brighter for the occasion. Sophie, in her Sunday dress, very plain and simple, but worn with that grace which is instinctive in the nation, was waiting counting the minutes. The carriage arrived in good time, and it was with a beating heart Sophie accompanied Madame Denain down the stairs; great was her relief when she had passed the door of the *concierge* without

seeing her step-mother. What a novel sensation it was, relieved from all anxiety, to emerge out of that melancholy narrow street, and after passing the quays to find herself in the full blaze and splendour of the Place Henri IV. Paris on a summer morning, its clear atmosphere, the sparkling river, tower and church standing out against the blue sky, with the masses of foliage in the distance. Sophie thought that she had never seen the city appear so beautiful; something of this was partly owing to her own frame of mind, for the light on an object comes frequently from our own hearts.

Sophie had never visited Notre Dame, and she was struck with astonishment as she entered one of the most magnificent structures that architectural skill ever raised to the glory of God. Nothing is more remarkable than its admirable proportions, its noble simplicity, the rose window with its elaborate tracery, the lace-like parapets, the flowers and foliage of exquisite workmanship, the varied colours cast

by the sun as its rays flow through the richly-stained glass. If ever there is a sympathy between the beholder and the building it is in one of these glorious cathedrals, of which it has been well said, men may imitate them, but can never create another. Why is it that, on entering such a sacred edifice, even the ignorant and untutored mind is elevated to noble and lofty ideas? It is not alone the majesty of the building, it is not only the beauty of its colouring and proportions, it is not that the hearts of those who built the shrine were like the pinnacles themselves, directed heavenward; it is that the edifice has been consecrated to the glory of God, and still more consecrated by the emotions, the sorrows, the prayers, the repentance, the sufferings of generations of worshippers; the very pavement has been worn by the knees and moistened by the tears of penitents. Within these walls, the rich and poor, the bad and good; Ormuzd and Ahriman, the comforter and the mourner, have knelt side by side.

For generations processions have swept forth, alike, through the Brides' door, and through the aisles to the portals of the gloomy vaults. Without, wild passions may have raged tumultuous through the darkness of evil days; but within all is peace. The light is ever burning, and the still small voice of Mercy speaks in accents of tenderness to the heart.

The organ pealed forth its solemn tones as Madame Denain and Sophie entered; the Cathedral was crowded to hear one of the eminent preachers who dared to raise his voice against the luxury and vice of the day. There was only room in one of the side aisles, and there Sophie knelt; and few prayers, among the many offered up, were more fervent than those of the young girl. Little did she think as she knelt there that in her person would be hereafter exemplified the hard rules of that Church into whose bosom she was pouring forth all the deep feelings that agitated her; that she was destined to fall under the anathema of that Faith which was at once her consolation

in the present, and her hope in the future. If under the most Christian King, the Church from time to time suffered persecution, she in her turn cruelly persecuted. When highly gifted Christian men, who, by the grandeur of their thoughts and the majesty of their expression, elevated the mind above the commonplace details of life, who could raise the soul by conscious strokes of art, who were the masters of all passions and their own, when such were denied the right of Christian burial,* and the Church fulminated its edicts against the stage while it failed to denounce the excesses of the Regency, or the extravagances of the Court of Louis XV, the Church of France lost its spirit of Catholicity.

* Molière died February, 1673; it was M. La Grange who expressed the indignation of the theatrical body at the manner in which his remains were treated. "On ne l'enterrait pas celui-là à Saint-Denis, on lui accordait, à peine *un peu de terre*, mais il s'était fait aimer et on le pleurait."


For it was at this time that those who represented on the stage those grand master-pieces

Sainte-Beuve says: "Le Curé de Saint-Eustache, sa paroisse, lui refusa la sépulture ecclésiastique. La veuve de Molière adressa, le 20 février, une requête à l'Archevêque de Paris, Harlay de Champvallon, accompagnée d'une d'Auteuil; elle courut à Versailles se jeter aux pieds du Roi; Louis XIV. congédia le curé et la veuve, en même temps il écrivit à l'Archevêque d'user de quelque moyen terme, il fut décidé qu'on accorderait un peu de terre, mais que le corps s'en irait directement, et sans être présenté à l'église."

And this, the eloquent writer continues, was one whose talent " Désormais était un des ornements, et des titres, on dirait même de l'humanité. Molière est un des hommes au profit de qui se font, et se feront toutes les conquêtes possible de la civilisation nouvelle. Les réputations, les génies futurs, les livres peuvent se multiplier, les civilisations peuvent se transformer dans l'avenir; mais il y a cinq ou six grandes œuvres qui sont entrées dans le fonds inaliénable de la pensée humaine. Chaque homme qui sait lire est un lecteur de plus pour Molière."

of Corneille, Racine, Molière, all names that must live as long as the French language, were refused the right of being buried in consecrated ground, and now the hour was drawing near when Sophie Guérin's destiny drew her towards that stage which by her unrivalled excellence she was soon to adorn.

The mass concluded, Madame Denain remembered her promise to take Sophie to St. Germain; the drive, though long, was a delightful one; the Champs Elysées, which they traversed, were very different from the magnificent avenue of the present day, but were equally frequented by the pomp and fashion of the capital; never had Sophie imagined a sight so picturesque and varied. Once out of Paris the woods extended on all sides, blending almost into one large forest the woods of Versailles and Meudon with that of St. Germain. The small house belonging to Madame Denain was situated close to the entrance at the back of the palace garden, almost joining that magnificent terrace which has been the delight of so many generations of Parisians: need we ask




if Sophie was delighted with the room which her kind friend had appropriated to her ? She longed for the day when they were to take possession of her new home. Madame Denain herself was well pleased to think she should soon leave her present gloomy abode, and it was late before they were tired of visiting every corner of the cottage and garden, and with joyful and grateful hearts they returned to Paris.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME DENAIN, in adopting Sophie Guérin, was not solely influenced by her desire to withdraw her from the harsh guardianship of her step-mother; from time to time her attention had been attracted to the graceful manners and charming voice of the little flower-girl, and it occurred to her that she was particularly adapted to a career in which there was an opening to a brilliant success, and in which she herself possessed certain personal influence. Madame Denain's brother, Monsieur Bonval, married Mademoiselle la Grange, the grand-

daughter of the great actor of the Théâtre Guénégaud, which company at that date (1674) had not yet received the designation of "les Comédiens du Roi," and who inheriting her grandfather's dramatic power had at an early age been received into this important and critical society; subsequently a distant relative unexpectedly left her a large fortune and a Château near Fontainebleau, where they resided after she had withdrawn from the stage, and where it was a great pleasure for Madame Bonval to collect her former associates to rehearse the new pieces, in which she frequently took a part, and gave the benefit of her tact and excellent judgment to the younger members of the corps. Madame Denain was an admirable critic, and although she never acted, she frequently read a part in such a manner as to make it a privilege to listen to her. Sophie had never been to a theatre, and the large play-bills which she saw on the walls in Paris conveyed to her no idea



of the stage. She was surprised and a little frightened when Madame Denain told her that they were to pass a week at Montfleury with Monsieur and Madame Bonval, when a play would be acted by the élite of the company of the Théâtre Français, for she had heard enough to be aware of the eminent talent of those of whom it consisted.

The age of Louis XIV. was a great epoch, not alone for its political and historical interest, but also for the progress of the drama and of letters; from this period dates an influence which no other country has ever possessed in so great a degree as France, the influence of the stage. It was the idea of Louis XIV. that, if the stage was to exist at all, the position of those who performed great parts, and who represented great characters, should be worthy of the authors whose works they placed before the public, and if so were fit objects for state support and protection; the king and his great minister, Mazarin, regarded

the stage as one of the most important means of elevating the public taste. His predecessor, the Cardinal Richelieu, had himself been a play-writer, and the Grand Corneille owed something to the admiration and poetic appreciation of the great Priest-Minister when he became one of the earliest members of that illustrious body, the Académie, which was founded by Richelieu in 1634. But it was not only as respects the stage, but in all matters connected with arts and refinement, the French nation advanced so rapidly, while its rulers were endowed with the spirit of the Renaissance. The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture was established in Paris in 1648; and it was Colbert who, in 1665, founded that admirable institution the Academy at Rome. It was felt, and justly felt, that the education of the taste of the people was second only in importance to its military and political progress; notwithstanding this, the stage had to contend against the church. The calling of the actor was de-

graded by Ecclesiastical tradition ; the transcendent genius of a Shakespeare and Corneille, the eternal heritage not of one country but of the world, was overshadowed by the gloom of fanaticism, which in France became cruel persecution. In France, so far back as the Council of Arles, in 314, a solemn decree excommunicated all persons exercising the theatrical profession ; no sacraments were to be administered to them, and as marriage is one of the sacraments they were practically denied the right of marriage. These enactments were set aside from time to time by the will of the King, but were never abolished ; and although so deeply interested in the well-being of the stage, the King did not venture to call another Ecclesiastical Council, as in all probability it would only have renewed, or have even rendered more severe, these edicts ; yet by a strange contradiction the most eminent of the clergy were at times the great supporters of the drama. In 1631 the Cardinal La Valette was so pleased with the actor Mondory, that he gave him a pension.

And it was the same prelate who brought Corneille to Paris.

In opposition to the church, the theatre in France was supported by all that was eminent and illustrious in the country, and to its influence was greatly owing the position which Paris so long held as the centre of refinement and taste; but the most important step taken in the interest of the stage was when the Théâtre Français was constituted and endowed by the State. In the early period of Louis XIV. there had existed three companies of Paris comedians, that of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, Le Théâtre de Marais, and the Troupe de Molière; those of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, as early as the days of Louis XIII., had styled themselves or at any rate were distinguished as the Troupe Royale des Comédiens, and they sent a memorial to the King praying him that they might be permitted always to occupy the same hotel, without paying any rent to the Confrères de la Passion, to whom it had originally belonged.

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This conflict with a powerful confraternity lasted from 1615 to 1677, when Louis XIV. settled the question in a summary manner; he turned the *Confrères de la Passion* adrift, but insisted on the company paying the same tax, only it was to go to the *Hôpital Général*; thus was the charge for the poor levied on every theatre; but what was of the greatest importance to the stage, the three theatres already mentioned were united in one, that of the *Hôtel de Bourgogne*, when they were granted permission to take the name of *Les Comédiens du Roi*; and this was no empty honour, for the King shortly after bestowed a subsidy on the theatre, and it was the foundation of that admirable society which is known as *La Comédie Française*.

It is probable that but for some subvention the works of Corneille and Racine would never have been put on the stage. Molière had his own small theatre, and his plays did not demand such an outlay as the classic Masters of the French Drama. But the prices were too low to

command the highest art without the royal support; the best boxes were only three francs, the pit fifteen sous, the gallery ten sous; these were the prices of the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Molière's were even lower. The actor Villiers wrote :

“ Venez donc, tous les curieux,
Venez : apportez votre troque,
Dedans notre Hôtel de Bourgogne,
Venez en foule : apportez-nous
Dans le parterre quinze sous,
Dix sous dans les galeries.”


And out of these poor returns, one sixth had to be paid as a tax for the poor. It would appear also that even these receipts were diminished by the great families supporting the stage by their presence, and omitting to pay—a practice which is, perhaps, not peculiar to any country, or to any period. Therefore, but for the great Ministers, Richelieu and Mazarin, the drama would have fallen as low in France as it did in England at that period. The Comédie



Française was not more assisted by the State aid than by the admirable Constitution of the Society. To be admitted a member of this body was, from the first, considered a great distinction ; it could only be by the almost unanimous approval of the whole Company that any actor or actress might enter as a *pensionnaire* ; they then had to remain in this grade a year before becoming eligible to join the Company as *sociétaires*. And every *sociétaire* was compelled to be re-elected at the expiration of ten years. It required no less than twenty years' service to obtain a pension of four thousand francs ; but these pensions were guaranteed by the State, the charge being divided equally between the government and the *sociétaire* who succeeded to the place of the retiring member, so that every actor or actress of ability, and of good conduct, was secured from future want ; also on the death of any member, the whole company subscribed to give a small donation to the next heir, as is graphically expressed, "afin de le donner dans la perte qu'il a faite une consolation plus forte que les meilleurs complimens."

The excellent result of the foundation of the Comédie Française, and of the support given it by the State, was proved by the admirable conduct which was one of the characteristics of the Members of the Company. Chappuzeau in the chapter of his work on "*Le Théâtre Français*," entitled, "*De la Conduite des Comédiens*," praises their exemplary conduct in their families—no people were more attentive to their religious duties : on the Sundays and Festivals of the Church, on all the Holy Days, and during the Passion Week and Holy Week the theatre was closed, and the Company frequently, in a body, attended the religious services, "*puisque'ils avaient embrassé un genre de vie qui est fort du monde, ils devaient, hors de leurs occupations, travailler doublement à s'en détacher.*"

This Society was also remarkable for their charities. The same writer tells us that the Company took certain hospitals and religious houses under their special care, and not unfrequently gave representations, when the receipts were entirely devoted to the poor. All the per-



secutions and ecclesiastical censures to which they were subjected were met by them in the true Christian spirit of forgiveness of injuries; thus while Bossuet affirmed that “la pratique constante est de priver des sacrements, et à la vie, et à la mort, ceux qui jouent la comédie, s'ils ne renoncent à leur art, et de les passer à la Sainte Table comme des pêcheurs publics,” Madeleine Bégart bequeathed a large sum to the Church of Saint Paul, in perpetuity, for two masses a week; also, a sum to be distributed daily to five poor people, in memory of the “five wounds of our Saviour.” And even under the Regency, the theatre was opened in 1716, “Au nom de Dieu, de la Vierge Marie, de Saint François de Paul, et des âmes en purgatoire;” and a glorious tribute to their merit was given by the Magistracy of Paris, when the President of the Bar, on a great public occasion, said:

“I should be unjust if I were to pass over in silence the virtues of the Members of the Comédie Française, for never has one of this body been brought before any tribunal, and this

cannot be said almost of any other public body in the whole kingdom."

And yet, when Crébillon died, and the Curé of Saint-Jean de Latran consented to perform the funeral service, he was sentenced to pay a fine of two hundred francs, and to three months of seclusion.


The account that Madame Denain gave Sophie of the rise of the Théâtre Français greatly interested her; and she expressed the feeling how pleasant it would be to belong to such a Society; the observation was agreeable to Madame Denain, and she waited with almost as great impatience as Sophie the day that was fixed for their visit to Mont Fleury.

CHAPTER V.

MONT FLEURY is one of those old châteaux which are peculiar to France, and possess an aspect and an architecture of their own. Built more than three centuries since, surrounded by a moat, and with towers at each corner, it was formerly capable of being defended against any incidental attack, although not of withstanding a regular siege. Approached from the road by a long wide avenue of poplars, it was situated on an extensive plateau, while the hills around it were covered with the then wild forest of Fontainebleau. La Fontaine-belle-Eau, which Henri III. called “notre délicieux

séjour de Fontaine-belle-Eau." Time had to this date dealt very tenderly with some of these grand Historic Châteaux ; if any of the walls were crumbling away, the thick ivy concealed the decay. It was reserved for those living a quarter of a century from this period to witness the overthrow of so many such memorials of the chivalry and glories of France.

At this time, also, utilitarianism refrained from touching the beauty of the forest with its hard hand. The town of Fontainebleau and the neighbouring hamlets, had not encroached on the wild beauty of these vast regal demesnes ; the few houses in the immediate vicinity of the palace only sufficed to lodge the retinue when the Court inhabited it. As in the days of our Norman sovereigns, the chase was one of the great prerogatives of the Crown, and for the sake of reserving immense tracts of country for the royal sport, large sacrifices were made by themselves, and were required from the people ; and, indeed, even so late as the latter part of the reign of Louis XV., when the " small cloud" might have




been seen on the horizon, and “the first gust of the future tempest which was to blow down alike palace and cottage, might even then, by the attentive listener, have been heard rustling around each dwelling;” even then the forest laws were as stringent as ever, and the divine right of game was as carefully protected. The park of Versailles formed an enclosure of ten leagues. Rambouillet contained thirty thousand acres. In the park of Fontainebleau herds of a hundred stags might be seen; but, severe as were the forest laws, the people derived one advantage from them, when, even so near the capital as at Versailles and at Meudon, large spaces were claimed and taken possession of by the Crown for their diversion of the Court the public being permitted the enjoyment of them so long as they in no way interfered with the Sovereign’s sport, and it was a great delight at holiday times to travel down to Fontainebleau or Chantilly, and wander for many miles amid the charms of these solitudes. Sophie, who had never been so far from Paris, was in exuberant spirits as they

traversed the varied and beautiful scenery, for no forest in France is more diversified; there are chains of hills, almost worthy the name of mountains, separated by large gorges; and desolate tracts, laid waste by fire, are surrounded by woods in all the majesty of their antiquity; there are rocks piled on rocks, with torrents dashing between them, worthy of the pencil of Salvator Rosa, the sunlit glades contrasting with the deep shadows of the masses of wood; now and then a herd of deer would fly across the road, turn to gaze on the carriage, and then dash on to new pastures. They drove by some of those venerable trees which were known to all frequenters of the forest; indeed, the old road was constructed not as in modern times, to find the shortest distance from post to post, but the surveyors and local administrators in former days were themselves frequently admirers of the scenery amid which their work lay, and the road was carried so as to gratify the traveller by the beauties of the country through which he was journeying; so Sophie had the opportunity of

seeing many of those trees which are considered to be the grandest of the forest. They are all designated by names dear to France, as associated with its glories; there is the oak of Charlemagne, of Clovis, of Henri IV., of Sully, and there they still remain defiant of the storms which sometimes sweep away acres of the weaker plants. Not far from Mont Fleury they saw the chapel, now destroyed, built in memory of Saint Louis, who was there rescued from the hands of a band of robbers; and then they turned into the long avenue which led to the château where Monsieur and Madame Bonval were waiting to bid them welcome.

After a life passed in the Rue de Grille, it may be well imagined how much Sophie was surprised at the grandeur of the château, a grandeur arising not from the richness of its decorations or its furniture, but from the noble proportions of the rooms. Monsieur Bonval did not affect to maintain a feudal establishment, on the contrary, nothing could be simpler than his mode of life.

In France, except at moments of national extravagance, the upper classes are remarkable for their simplicity of life, for a far greater independence of character and of "what will people say" than is generally found in England. Neither Monsieur Bonval nor his wife forgot her origin, and they felt that it would have been a great mistake for the grand-daughter of Monsieur La Grange, by accident the proprietor of a splendid château, to have attempted to maintain the state of its former aristocratic owners, but they exercised a most generous hospitality, and, above all, were the friends and protectors of the poor for many miles round. The entrance-hall was used as a theatre for the performances of the Comédie Française when they paid their former colleague a visit; somewhat gloomy and sombre, it formed a contrast to the adjoining apartments, which were furnished in the light style of the period. At the end of the gallery was a little chapel, which had been recently restored, and the sunset cast its bright colours on the white marble pavement; exquisite bas-reliefs carved in oak



ornamented the altar. The arms of the old family were panelled in the walls. The place that knew the De Chaumonts in former days, would know them no more, but many more châteaux associated with all the deeds of the days of chivalry were before long to pass out of the possession of the great families into those of unknown strangers. No one at that time, amid all the glitter and splendour of the Court of Louis XV., for a moment foresaw the coming troubles.

The next day the establishment was occupied with preparations for the reception of their theatrical friends. A temporary stage was erected in the hall. At this time, as well as during the whole reign of Louis XIV., the *mise-en-scène* of the Comédie Française was little attended to. The interest was really centered in the play, not in its decorations; in general there was but one scene: a room with four doors, and this was supposed to represent any period or any country. It was only on very grand occasions, when the King and Court were present, that great extravagance in deco-

rations was much expected. There was therefore little trouble required to prepare the great hall, and Sophie passed her time in wondering what these important personages resembled. To the untutored mind an actor is always an abstraction, and those who see him on the stage, embodying the great conceptions of the great poets, cannot realize him as he leaves the stage-door in ordinary and too frequently time-worn dress, as was the case at this date at the Comédiens Italiens, and other small theatres.*


* Chappuzeau writes: "Le Théâtre Italien était le centre de la liberté, la source de la joie, l'asile des chagrins domestiques: les Italiens donnent un champ libre sur la scène à tout le monde; l'officier vient sur le bord du Théâtre étaler ingénieusement aux yeux du marchand la dorure qu'il lui doit encore; l'enfant de famille, sur les frontières de l'orchestre, fait la moue à l'usurier qui ne saurait lui demander le principal, ni les intérêts; le fils, mêlé avec les acteurs, rit de vive voix son père avare, cieux faire le pied de grue dans le parterre, pour lui

At this period all the interest in the stage was centered in the Comédie Française; the best part of a century had elapsed since its foundation, but the great histrionic names conferred honour on the country. There were Champmeslè, Baron, Poisson, La Grange, La Tuilerie, Haute-Roche, Verneuil, and among the actresses, De Brie, Dupin, Guyot, De Croisy Raisin, Beuval; many of these had transmitted their talents to their descendants, and their names were still represented on the stage. Of the later families who were introduced to the theatre, the two names that excited the greatest interest, were the Mesdemoiselles Dumeslin and Clairon. Both these were invited on the present occasion to the château and excited the greatest curiosity in Sophie; as she stood at the window which overlooked the long avenue, and when the

laisser quinze sous de plus après sa mort. Ainsi quand on voit un homme à l'Hôtel Bourgogne, on peut dire qu'il a laissé tout son chagrin chez lui, pourvu qu'il y ait laissé sa femme."

two carriages did appear, she felt as if a crisis in her destiny was drawing near. Is it the case that not only in the "sunset of life there is mystical love," but that there are moments in the spring time of life when the mind seems to be able to seize through the passing minutes a faint glance of the future. Sophie had, at all events, the trepidation which is the herald of great events or great emotions.

When the carriages drew up at the entrance, and Sophie saw their occupants, the illusion was dispelled; she could not realize that these ordinary mortals were the "Comédiens du Roi," whom all the great people of the Court crowded to see perform; there was nothing grand or majestic in the appearance of these personages—even Mademoiselle Dumeslin and Mademoiselle Clairon, of whom she had heard so much, did not realize the creations of her imagination. They were all in excellent humour, much pleased with their drive, and instead of high-flown sentences and ideas, they gossiped about all the ordinary events of society, as if




they had never lived with the tragic muse or evoked tears and sighs from a sympathizing audience.

Yet in the evening, when Mademoiselle Clairon appeared in a picturesque dress, not extravagant and costly, but graceful beyond the reach of art, Sophie soon changed her opinion ; the conversation took a graver tone ; the topic was one in which they were all deeply interested—for at this time, as the expenses of the Crown increased every year, it had been suggested that the subsidy to the Comédie Française should be reduced—then Mademoiselle Clairon's face, when she spoke, was lit with enthusiasm, and Sophie gazed with unfeigned admiration on the beauty of her expression ; she was very earnest on the subject, as if she felt all her own worth ; she possessed dignity without pride of manner. Hers was truly

“ Un esprit juste et gracieux,
Solide dans le sérieux,
Charmant dans les bagatelles.”


The colour rose in her cheek, and her eyes gleamed with intelligence. Monsieur Bonval maintained that the company, once organized, could maintain itself without any aid from the State. "Even if it could," said Mademoiselle Clairon, "the stage is so admirable a school for all ranks of men, for all professions, that the State should make use of it for the sake of the advantage it would derive from it in the education of the people. In the highest parts, wherein actions are put in their praiseworthy point of view, the State has the opportunity of seeing how they affect the masses, and can hence judge how to reward them. Or, if it is wished to censure the vices and follies of the day, how can people see what is ridiculous and contemptible better than on the stage? I repeat that the stage is the greatest school of morals; theatrical art should be introduced into the education of children. Writers of the highest character have written comedies for them, considering these excellent for the purpose of securing



a good pronunciation, proper self-confidence, and the graces of deportment. How may an incipient George Dandin, or a Monsieur Jourdain, or a Harpagon have been rendered keenly alive to their follies, presumptions, and meannesses by the creations of Molière. Will not the name of Tartuffe be transmitted to all posterity as the type of consummate hypocrisy; but, however marvellous the genius of Molière, would his plays have survived if they had only been read at home? No, it is to the stage they will owe their power and fame; perhaps," added she, smiling, "to the Comédie Française. And would the Comédie Française ever have been in its present flourishing condition but for the support of Richelieu, Louis XIV., and Mazarin, and the generosity of the State?"

"A poet has no stage," said M. Baron, "and his works leave an indelible impression on the mind, and guide the age; the poet is as great a teacher as the dramatist, and he requires no scenic effects. Poets have in-

fluenced the world, the gift of communicating lofty emotions and glorious images to men is theirs ; the minstrels of former days were welcome in all societies, and their songs became a rich inheritance bequeathed to posterity ; the greatest sovereigns and conquerors have paid homage to poets, who transmitted the memory of their great works and victories to history. I am not now speaking against the organization of our own admirable Society, but I think that we have been recently deviating from the grand simplicity of our early representations, when one scene served for many plays, and the success of the Comédie Française entirely depended on the knowledge and the appreciation of our parts. The State has recently been interfering, I think, injudiciously ; it demands that we should find more amusement for the money ; by grandeur of decoration and finer costumes, we are expected on the stage to represent the magnificence off it ; this is why I feel there will be little to regret even if the State carries out the menace of this reduction. You see, Mademoiselle, that



I take even a higher view of our art than yourself."

"I rejoice to find," continued Mademoiselle Clairon, "that there seems, except among the clergy, to be but one opinion as to the importance of the stage, and it is only because the old spirit of persecution still exists in the church authorities that we have been exposed to this shameful treatment. Our dramatists have been remarkable for their elevation of character and the excellence of their lives. Corneille and Racine passed their days in doing good, as well as in composing great works ; and two of Corneille's sons are enrolled among that clergy which anathematizes the stage. This hostility of the church seems quite incomprehensible, when we know what support they have derived from our exertions. What is the petition of the Pères Cordeliers? why, they pray that they may be placed on the list of those amongst whom we distribute our charity ; there is no community they say who suffer so much from poverty,

and they frequently are in want of bread. And then the Augustins of the Faubourg St. Germain, they also humbly ask to share our alms, and to be added to the list of religious houses which partake of our bounty. Yet every year we are regarded by the clergy with increasing dislike and mistrust. During the last century, at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, at the opening of the season the priests and vicars were invited to be present and to offer us their good wishes. Loret says they then sang

“ Un nodet, Te Deum et Messe,
Le curé, prêtres, et vicaires,
Chantres, comédiens, et moi,
Criâmes tous ‘ Vive le Roi ! ’ ”

“ And now we are under a ban as if we were the worst of criminals.”*

* At one time the Jesuits had a theatre in the College of Clermont, since the College of Louis-le-Grand, where they took money at the doors. Loret says, “ Qu’il assista au Collège de Saint Ignace en Août, 1658, à une tragédie, pour quinze sous, le même prix qu’il eut donné

“Never mind,” said Monsieur Hubert, “we can do good without any assistance from the clergy, when we have the support of His Majesty; what does not the stage owe to Louis XIV., who soothed the dying hours of the great Corneille? whose last words were expressions of gratitude to his sovereign. Were not His Majesty and the Duchess of Orleans the sponsors for the child of Molière? As for the incident of the ‘*L’en cas de nuit*,’ it has been illustrated by the greatest artists, and popula-

à l’Hôtel de Bourgogne pour voir une tragédie de Corneille; et outre la tragédie,

On y dansa quatre ballets,
Moitié graves, moitié follets,
Chacun ayant plusieurs entrées,
Tout plusieurs furent admirées,
Et vrai comme rimeur je suis
La vérité sortant de puits,
Par ses pas et ses pirouettes,
Ravit et prudes et coquettes.

Loret does not say who were the performers in the ballet.

rised by many an engraver. Whom but Molière did the King delight to honour so much, as to order his 'en cas de nuit' to be brought to his bed-side, where he commanded Molière to be seated, and himself carved for the great dramatist a wing of a chicken? Surely this was as great a distinction as that paid to Titian by Charles V., when the Empereur picked up the brush the painter had dropped; saying, 'Titians should be served by Emperors,' and the more so as Saint-Simon affirms that, except when with the army, no one was ever known to eat at the same table as His Majesty, not even the Princes of the Blood; and even with the army, it was thought the highest distinction for Vauban to have been invited to dinner after the siege of Namur.* It was on all occasions the wish of the

* Chappuzeau says: "Louis XIV. une fois a admis une simple bourgeoise à sa table; après une visite qu'il avait faite au Jardin des Plantes. Le Directeur Vallot, un homme considérable, l'Esculape de la Cour, car il était

King that every consideration should be shown to the members of the Comédie Française ; they were permitted to have guards whenever they required them, and were even admitted to the

Médecin du Roi, dit Loret, offrit au Roi une collation qui lui coûta cent mille francs, que même

Monsieur Vallot servit le Roi,
Et dans ce repas eut la gloire
De lui donner trois fois à boire.

Et que le Roi, touché des attentions de son hôte, daigna inviter, non pas Vallot, mais sa femme, à s'asseoir à sa table, qu'après qu'elle s'en fut excusée dix fois. Ce meilleur des Rois le voulant absolument, Madame Vallot obéit ; l'extraordinaire cette fois était d'y recevoir une bourgeoise.

De plus, cet absolu Seigneur
Voulut que sa femme eut l'honneur,
Honneur certes considérable,
De repaître à sa propre table,
Elle s'en excusa dix fois.
Mais enfin ce meilleur des Rois,


The Théâtre Français.

oucher. "Do you see, my friends," added Monsieur Hubert, "we can dispense with the protection of the Church, but the Church cannot well dispense with our charities; yet it is still very painful and strange that so large and powerful a body should oppose that love of art for art's sake which exists amongst us, and attack us in this uncharitable and indiscriminating manner, for a large portion of our profession have one great end in view, to elevate human nature; and the Church, instead of repudiating us, should aid us in the noble task of kindling the noblest sympathies and evoking the highest emotions. Which of us can ever forget the painful scene which occurred at our loved and admired friend Adrienne Lecouvreur's

Dit, ce qui lui plaise, favorise,

Ordonna qu'elle y fut amise.

Loret adds: "Aux fêtes de Versailles, en 1668, il admet à sa table une certaine nombre de femmes titrées, et avec elles encore une bourgeoise, la Présidente Tam-bonneau."



death? Where was there ever on the stage one who spoke with a greater flow of poetry and passion? Never was witnessed more tender pathos, combined with a grander dignity; and yet when she died—it seems but the other day—after so short an illness, she had to be buried in the street in the vicinity of that theatre she had adorned, in the darkness of the night by the lurid light of torches.”

“It is a shame, a disgrace,” exclaimed Mademoiselle Clairon, “and the one object of my life shall be to have this stigma removed from us.”

It was not without pain that Madame Denain listened to this conversation. However admirable the Théâtre Français, it was still matter of grave reflection to introduce Sophie to a life which the Church so harshly condemned. Sophie little knew what was passing in the mind of her protectress; she listened eagerly to the impassioned language with which the guests spoke of their profession. She was absorbed with the beauty of Mademoiselle

Clairon, and her cheeks glowed with the same earnestness when she heard of the cruelty practised towards the dead, denounced in such thrilling tones.

When Sophie retired that night, her mind was full of deep and varied emotions; she thought of all that she had heard; she recalled the noble words to which she had listened, and the sweet and gentle expression of Mademoiselle Clairon. What a charming existence they all seemed to lead, and yet a great shadow fell upon her heart as she thought that the Church denied its offices to those who belonged to the profession. It must, she thought, be a terrible thing to be cut off from the Church and its cherished associations; how great then was the mission Mademoiselle Clairon had undertaken, never to rest until these hateful enactments were withdrawn.

CHAPTER V.

THE next day was devoted to finishing the preparations in the hall for the performance of the evening. Not that much was required : a few screens were intended to represent the different scenes. It was justly thought that the play would depend on the high merit of the performers, and not on the carpenter and decorator ; still, as the few families residing near Mont-Fleury were to be invited, there were arrangements to be made which fully occupied the party. A raised stage had to be erected, for nothing gives more confidence to the actor or assists the illusion more than for the actor to stand on a different level from the

audience. Here again Mademoiselle Clairon was the animating spirit of the party; she settled the perspective, arranged the lights, and hung up some old tapestries which had been long neglected, and the old hall soon assumed a festive appearance; her inventive genius supplied all deficiencies. Madame Bonval's new position had in no way diminished her interest in her old friends and associates, and it may be said that anyone who has achieved success on the stage never left that pleasing anxious labour without casting many a longing, lingering look behind. To command the heart to beat and tears to flow at will, is a power so great that it is not willingly relinquished. Of all the parts she played, none was more admirably enacted than that of hostess.

Although the days were long, the performance was postponed until the dusk; it was one of M. Baron's (who was the general manager) creeds that plays in the daylight should be avoided, because effects cannot be produced properly on the stage, except by the aid of artificial light;


and also that it is not until the material work of the day is over that full force can be given to the imagination; when the mind is free of petty cares, noble sayings and words that burn are more vividly impressed on the mind. "We are then," he said, "best prepared not only to admire, but to sympathize." It was with such feelings of sympathy that all the invited guests arrived at the Château, in the various conveyances which had been hired for the occasion in the neighbouring village. It was not such an assemblage as that before which the distinguished party acted at Versailles or at the Louvre; there were no carriages preceded by running footmen bearing torches; no royal equipage, surrounded by a glittering escort, bearing one of the Princes of the Blood, rolled up to the door. But had such suddenly appeared containing these grand personages, they could not have received a warmer and courtlier welcome. There were among the visitors many who had never been at Court, rarely even to Paris; they consisted principally

of that simple, frugal, warm-hearted class which may be found even now in the provinces in France. Great was the delight of the whole party when the dear old *curé* entered; one of those excellent men who had at that time, and probably have now, a greater influence in the country than rulers are generally aware of, or are willing to recognize; one of

“Those priests—the gentle priests and good, your fathers
loved to hear,
Sole type below 'midst work and woe, of the God whom
we revere,”

always welcome on the fête-day at the table of the Seigneur; and any hour in the cottage, sharing the frugal repast; ever *l'enfant de la famille*, the play-mate of childhood, the guide of youth, the consoler of age; his ambition and aspirations limited to the circle of his duties; possessing a pittance of income, but the possessor of a rich harvest of love in all its fulness.

But though a curate in a small district, Abbé



Lebel had, by the power of his intelligence, no little knowledge of human affairs. He had not lived much in the world; but he was aware that there was a great change going on in all society: through the perpetual civil wars the landmarks of the ancient faiths, Catholic, Feudal, Social, had been shaken, and he felt that the age of Louis XIV. had, in spite of its grave errors and terrible persecutions, made a great advance in earnestness and excellence. It was in this reign that the ancient abbeys were reformed, religious communities and congregations were founded, and these reforms extended even to the Sorbonne and the University. Among other things, he knew that the King had endeavoured to elevate the stage, and that Corneille was favoured and especially protected by the Sovereign. Abbé Lebel regarded Corneille as the greatest improver of his age, as the author who only cared to represent all that is noble, heroic, and great in human nature, who, if he deviated sometimes from the ordinary practice of the stage, always drew a picture of men as they should be, as

the good, as the best men would desire them to be. What an eloquent tribute was paid to this great master by Racine at the reception at the Academy of the brother of the illustrious dramatist! How he invoked the inspiration of his marvellous genius; of that genius that produced on the stage the heroes of the past, surrounded by all the pomp and ornament of which language was capable! And the good Abbé respected Corneille for other works than his tragedies: for his works of piety, for his many good and generous deeds. Therefore it was that on every occasion, when the Comédie Française visited Mont Fleury, the Abbé was always invited, and never missed an opportunity of seeing heroes depicted in the most admirable manner.

All the visitors had arrived and taken their places, the Abbé seated in the front row, with the great approval of the performers, for his presence seemed to give that sanction to their performance which in years gone by, as has

been already observed, the Church always afforded to the stage. The play chosen was that most sublime of Corneille's works, "Polyeucte." Mademoiselle Clairon enacted Pauline, the noblest type of the grandeur of womanhood which has ever been expressed in language, compelled in deference to her father's will to marry Polyeucte, while she is attached to Sévère. When Polyeucte, converted to Christianity, throws down at the Pagan altar the sacred offerings and is condemned to die, by the judgment of her father, she not only uses her own influence, but persuades Sévère to induce Polyeucte to repent of his deed, and return to his ancient belief. But when her husband is finally condemned, she, struck with the grandeur of the faith that could endure to the last, is also converted to Christianity.

Nothing could be more admirable than her expression when she implores Sévère to rescue him who was so recently his rival, and it

was with breathless interest that the audience listened.

“ Je sçais que c’est beaucoup que ce que je demande,
Mais plus l’effort est grand plus la gloire en est grande,
Sauvez ce malheureux, employez-vous pour lui,
Faites-vous un effort pour le servir d’appui,
Conserver un rival dont vous êtes jaloux,
C’est un trait de vertu qui n’appartienne que vous ;
Et ci ce n’est assez de votre renommée
C’est beaucoup qu’une femme autrefois tant aimée,
Donne à votre grand cœur ce qu’elle a de plus cher.
Souvenez-vous enfin que vous êtes Sévère.”

Nor was the attention less absorbed by M. Baron, as Polyeucte, when he utters his beautiful soliloquy :—

“ Source délicieuse, en misères féconde,
Que voulez-vous de moi, flatteuses voluptés,
Heureux attachemens de la chair et du monde,
Que ne me quittez-vous, quand je vous ai quitté ?
Allez, bonheur plaisirs, qui me livrez la guerre.

“ Toute votre félicité
Sujette à l’instabilité,



En moins de rien tombe à terre,
Et, comme elle à l'éclat du verre,
Elle en a la fragilité.

“ Saintes douceurs du ciel, adorables idées,
Vous remplissez un cœur qui vous peut recevoir ;
De vos attraits sacrés les âmes possédées
Ne conçoivent plus rien qui les puissent émouvoir,
Vous promettez beaucoup, et donnez d'avantage.

“ Vos biens ne sont point inconstants,
Et l'heureux trépas que j'attends,
Ne vous sert que d'un doux passage,
Pour nous introduire au partage,
Qui nous rend à jamais contents.” *

* “ Delicious source, in sorrow, why
Still throbs each pulse with rapture's strain.
Leave me ! oh, leave me here to die.
No love ! no hope ! for me again,
Life and its joys are fleeting,
And the sweet familiar greeting,
The last fond word is spoken,
The crystal goblet broken.

And the actor's voice rose to the height of the greatness of the character, when Polyeucte is led to die, in the profession of his faith :—

“ Je n'adore qu'un Dieu, maître de l'univers,
Sous qui tremblent le ciel, la terre et les enfers,
Un Dieu qui, nous aimant d'une amour infinie,
Voulut mourir pour nous avec ignominie,
Et qui, par un effort de cet excès d'amour,
Veut pour nous en victime être offert chaque jour.”

Noble ideas, nobly expressed, and which thrilled through the audience. What a vocation for the stage Monsieur Baron had inherited ; how he rose to the noblest emotions ; there was not one present who did not feel his heart elevated

“ But holy joys and heavenly rest,
I now can welcome and adore,
These precious gifts when once possessed,
No future griefs can touch us more.
Heaven's love inconstant never,
Can compensate for her.
For all I leave below,
And this most cruel blow.”


by the grandeur of the theme and the nobility of its expression.

And how simple were the stage decorations. Monsieur Baron was right when he said the first evening, that a high standard of acting was independent of external arts; like the Theatre at Athens, where, in the open air, the actors required no scenic effects, but could, when they exclaimed ὦ γῆ καὶ θεοί, point to the soil of Attica and to the Acropolis of the City of the Violet Crown, with its temples sacred to the gods.

The last time the Comédie Française performed Polyeucte was at a grand ceremonial at Versailles; then in the scene of the Forum, there was one of those grand stage-decorations such as Louis XV. so greatly loved: triumphal arches were decorated with flowers; on the peristyle of the temple of Jupiter stood marble statues, and the painter and sculptor exhausted their art in the magnificence of the representation, while in the *cortège* of Sévère a Roman triumph, in all its historic barbaric splendour, was put on the stage.

Here there was nothing to aid the intense interest of the play, and the ability of the actors. All that can be said is that Pauline, Polyeucte and Sévère never appeared before a more appreciating audience than on this occasion, many of whom were moved to tears.

The performance was followed by a few passages from Molière's "Psyche," which were recited by Mademoiselle Dangeville. And a more perfect Psyché it would have been difficult to have selected. Her admirable grace and movement would have charmed any audience. Independent of her intrinsic merit as an actress, she fitly represented the lovely maid over whom it was said the Hours threw roses from the sky, and whom the Graces sprinkled with the most fragrant odours, Psyche with the wings of the butterflies, to intimate the soul of which she is the exquisite symbol. When in the fifth act, Psyche, in her grief and loneliness, murmurs forth her sorrows, she never could have told them in a sadder, sweeter strain than the Psyche on the stage that night.




" Pauvres amants, leur amour dure encore,
Tout morts qu'ils sont, l'un et l'autre m'adore.
Moi ! dont la durété reçut si mal leurs vœux,
Tu n'en fais pas ainsi, toi qui seul m'a ravie,
Amant, que j'aime encore, cent fois plus que ma vie.
Et qui brise de si beaux nœuds,
Ne me fuis plus, et souffle que j'espère,
Que tu pourras un jour rabaisser l'œil sur moi,
M'a forcé de souffrir, j'aurai de quoi te plaire,
De quoi me rengager ta foi." *

As she listened to the cadence of these lines,
Sophie sat spell-bound, her heart responded to
every word, the tears filled her eyes, and when

* *Psyche* appeared in 1671; but it is remarkable it was not entirely written by Molière, and it was Minault who composed most of the words, and set them to music. Molière arranged the plan of the play, and put it on the stage; the prologue, the first scene of the second act, the first of the third. Corneille also had a share in this tragedy. It had to be prepared in the greatest haste; for the King ordered it to be performed during the Carnival of 1671, when it was produced with the utmost magnificence.

the curtain fell she remained in her place as if longing for the words to be spoken again, as though a new inspiration had dawned upon her.

The party retired, not only having passed a most pleasant evening, but with a real store of memories and fresh invigorating thoughts. Sophie went to her room, but tried, in vain, to sleep. She rose and opened her window; it was a bright starlight night, so peaceful and still, scarcely the murmur of a breeze rustled the forest trees. As she gazed into the pale distance, and recalled the words of Psyche, it seemed as though there was a sympathy between the infinity of the heavens and of the human soul, Psyche. The soul! for her what a world of new ideas had been crowded into a brief space of time, into a few weeks, almost a few days, all owing to one kind friend, and that kind friend found by an accident—accident! are there any accidents in life? Are we not guided, guarded and shielded by loving influences unknown to us? May not even the strong man be led




by the hand of the little child? A kind Providence had permitted her to enjoy this happiness, and it cast a bright tint of colour on the future. She felt that for her also might exist a world in which all things beautiful should find a place. She, like the greatest and humblest, had her portion in it. The glory of the night—its waves of light—its dark mysterious shadows—she was a sharer in all this beauty. Why then might not she hope to possess the interest of others? Why should not she, like *Mademoiselle Dangeville*, be able to cause the tears to flow, to elevate the hearts of others by the melody of the voice? Was the future hopeless for her? Could she not achieve what others had done? Ah, she thought, alas, to obtain like results we must possess like gifts, and are these mine?

CHAPTER VI.

SOPHIE never imagined that, at the same moment, she was the subject of a long conversation between Madame Denain and Mademoiselle Clairon, on which her whole destinies depended. Madame Denain was right in her opinion that no one was more capable than this great actress of estimating the advantages and disadvantages of a theatrical career. Most especially was she able to form a just judgment in Sophie's case, as their two lives, up to Sophie's present age, had been very similar.


Mademoiselle Clairon was born in a small town in the Département du Nord, Saint-Waron



de Condé, near Condé, in Flanders. She seemed so delicate a child that her grandmother insisted that she should be baptised without a day's delay. It was during the Carnival, when one evening the *curé* and his *vicaire* were acting in a pantomime, the former dressed up as harlequin, the *vicaire* in a costume much resembling a clown. There was no time to unlock the church-door, so the child was taken to the ball-room, where some water was poured into a bowl, the music was stopped, and the ceremony was performed without priest or curate having the opportunity of changing their eccentric garb. Such was the first connection of the Stage and the Church in Mademoiselle Clairon's career. Her girlhood was in many respects as miserable as Sophie's; substitute mother for step-mother, and there was little to choose between them. There were no caresses, no tenderesses lavished upon her; she was not sent to sell flowers, but, what she would have considered worse, was locked up in a little room to get through a certain quantity of work, when menaces and even blows

were her portion, if it was not accomplished within a given time. Her natural excellence is expressed in her conviction that to this harshness of treatment she owed her tenderness and compassionate interest in others. One day, as she was standing on a chair to see the cause of some excitement in the narrow street (for the family had moved to Paris), she noticed for the first time a young girl in the room exactly opposite her own, taking a dancing-lesson. The window was open, so she could watch every graceful movement. When the lesson was ended, the members of the family who were present, applauded, and her mother tenderly embraced her. The child was so overcome by the contrast between her life and this scene of domestic happiness, thus suddenly revealed to her, that she burst into tears. When she looked up again, the scene had vanished.


At first she felt as if she had committed a fault in enjoying such pleasurable emotions ; then she looked forward to the same gratification on the following day, but resolved to keep her secret, lest her mother should change her room. The next



day, as she had anticipated, the same scene was renewed, but after the dancing-lesson, instead of crying, she endeavoured to imitate some of these graceful attitudes; and a pretty picture it must have been: to have seen the young girl before her glass, her fair face animated with her exertions, and her long hair falling on her shoulders as she endeavoured to render more supple the natural graces of her figure; one day she received unforeseen aid of a humble nature, namely, from a barrel-organ. An Italian boy frequently played opposite her window; she felt quite grateful to the little vagrant who provided her with music, and now and then threw him a few *sous*, and then he was certain to return the next day. Perhaps there was a kind of sympathy between these lonely children, and that the smile with which he was greeted, attracted him as much as the *sous*.

After a time, she took advantage of the violin in the opposite room, and after a hasty glance at the attitude or step, would hurriedly withdraw

to practise it. The result of all these efforts became manifest in her. Her movements became remarkable for their ease and grace, while the constant study of beauty and refinement at last was depicted in her countenance. Instead of an unhappy constrained look, a new light beamed there. All the visitors to the house remarked this change; she, who was always short, seemed to gain in height. The mother's vanity was gratified when she heard everyone remark:—"What have you done with your little girl? what grace! what a charm she possesses!" Still the young girl kept her secret; until one day, when her own window was open, and she was in the middle of one of her imitations, the violin suddenly stopped, and she saw the young lady she had been imitating standing at the window, watching her movements with intense interest, for she was no less surprised than was Mademoiselle Clairon herself, when, for the first time, she had gazed on the charming vision. The two young girls looked at each other with mutual pleasure, but Mademoiselle Clairon, caught in the midst of her practising, was overwhelmed with confusion



as she approached the window ; the one countenance wore the smile of encouragement, the other of hope. The new friend was Mademoiselle Dangeville, one of the most promising pupils of the Théâtre Français, and she was taking lessons in dancing and pose, not with the object of dancing, but of learning grace of movement and dignity of attitude.*

When the little Clairon next saw her mother, it was with fear and trembling lest her secret was known. Indeed, it had become so, because Monsieur Baudry, Mademoiselle Dangeville's dancing-master, passing the house, had congratu-

* Mademoiselle Clairon in her "Réflexions des talens qu'on peut acquérir," says, " Pour bien marcher, pour se présenter avec noblesse, gesticuler avec grâce et facilité, pour se donner de l'aplomb et de l'ensemble, pour n'avoir jamais d'attitude qui contrarie la nature, il est indispensable de s'instruire à fond de la danse, noble et figurée ; il faut bien se garder d'apprendre à former des pas, et d'avoir l'air arrangé d'un danseur ; mais le reste de son art est de toute nécessité."

lated Madame Clairon on having so accomplished a daughter. When her mother heard these praises, she had one of those sudden revulsions of feelings so common to passionate natures, and to Mademoiselle's great surprise, instead of being scolded, she found herself tenderly embraced, and she was told that she might go to the play with her new friends. The young girl's delight may be easily imagined when she was taken to the Théâtre Français, and saw the tragedy of the "Conte d'Essex" and "Les Folies Amoureuses." "No language," she says, "can describe what passed in me that evening and the whole of the next day; I could neither eat nor talk; so concentrated was I within myself, I saw nothing of what was going on around me; my great happiness was to recall each scene of the play; and, to my own astonishment, I found that I was able to repeat more than a hundred verses of the tragedy, and two-thirds of the second piece. I endeavoured to imitate each actor, to recite and to move like Poisson, and always to maintain the charm-

ing manner of Mademoiselle Dangeville; in fact, I was so absorbed with one idea, that of becoming an actress, that no argument, no ill-treatment could shake my resolution."


Her determination of character conquered all obstacles, and after long studies under Deshayes, she made her first appearance at the Théâtre Italien, and won universal approbation; but her great triumph was when, six months later, she was accepted at the Français, where she chose the part of Phèdre, and her success was complete. At twenty-three years of age she took her place as the greatest classical actress at the Français, and at that theatre, the first in the world, she was an artist in the highest sense of the word, full of the dignity of the characters she enacted, and giving even to the conceptions of Corneille an inspiration all her own; her mind and intelligence added greatly to the natural grace of her figure and the tender beauty of her expression. There was a poem in her heart, and it seemed to

pour forth its melody in every word.* Some privileged natures are like instruments, that the master-hand can touch and call forth any symphony, the solemn, the passionate, the tender, and loving. Mademoiselle Clairon's was pre-eminently such a nature, and the miseries of her own early life enabled her to sympathise with the difficulties of others,

“ Quanta la cosa è più perfetta,
Più sente il bene è così la dolienza.”

Her natural kindness and indulgence of heart, developed by her studies of the highest lives, made her feel for others; she was well able

* Thomas, the author of “ L'éloge de Descartes,” and “ Marc Aurèle,” says, “ Elle peignit, avec le visage seul, toutes les passions, la haine, la colère, l'indignation, l'indifférence, la tristesse, la douleur, l'amour, l'humanité, la gaieté, la joie. Elle peignit non-seulement les passions en elles-mêmes, mais encore toutes les nuances et toutes les différences qui les caractérisent, par exemple, dans la crainte elle exprime la frayeur, la peur, l'émotion, le saisissement, l'inquiétude.”



therefore to enter into Madame Denain's views, when she talked to her that evening about Sophie, and the more so when she heard that their early lives had been very similar, and that Sophie had but a few weeks been relieved from a childhood as painful as her own.

The conversation with Madame Denain was a protracted one. Mademoiselle Clairon, who, while she was acting, had noticed the deep interest and concentration of Sophie's attention, and the play of her features, felt assured of her vocation for the stage. And if it should appear, on trial, that her countenance was a fair indication of her powers, she strongly advised that she should adopt the profession.

"There is no situation," she remarked, "in which we are rendered more sensible of the generous feelings of those around us. Mark how a noble passage of a great author is applauded, what sympathy there is with his sentiments. There is no career in which, whoever succeeds, is more exempted from the small annoyances of

life. I feel this, for I say with Bernardin de St. Pierre, 'Une seule épine me fait plus de mal que l'odeur de cent roses me fait du bien ; la meilleure compagnie me semble mauvasie si je rencontre un importun, un curieux, un médisant, un perfide.' I was subjected to annoyance when first I appeared at Rouen. One unkind individual had the power to inflict more pain on me than the almost universal approbation of the public gave me pleasure ; but once enrolled in this illustrious company, it is like passing life in grand galleries of statues and pictures, surrounded by friends who are themselves the objects of admiration ; the highest in the land seek our society, not only in the theatre, but in the salons. The State, by its support, dignifies our calling and elevates the drama to a great national institution."

"And alas ! the Church," interrupted Madame Denain. "There is great difficulty in recommending a profession which lies under the ban of the Church ; it seems terrible to be as it were excommunicated from her bosom, driven

from her portals ; it truly seems a cruel injustice."

"You heard my opinion last evening," said Mademoiselle Clairon ; "it is, indeed, cruel injustice ; can anything be more opposed to all real feeling ? Is a profession that demands the highest education, profound studies, elevation of mind, and the development of all the most noble qualities of our nature to be continually humiliated ? it is inconceivable, but the shame that it is intended should attach to us, falls entirely on the nation that tolerates such treatment."

"That the Sovereign should honour us, invite us into his presence, pension us ; that the high officers of State who are present at the performance ; that the author who submits his work to us ; that the public who crowd the scene listen and applaud, are all innocent, except ourselves is inconceivable. I implicitly obey authority. I add fresh beauties to the great works confided to me. I afford the public hours of enjoyment, and I am punished and persecuted ; this is illogical and shameful.

“If theatres are pernicious, let them be abolished. If, on the contrary, they are capable of being made the means of social improvement, then in all reason grant to those who promote these objects the reward of their merit.

“And what is there disgraceful in the profession, when the highest intelligences have devoted themselves to it? It was Louis XIII. who published the famous declaration which was registered by the Parliament: ‘We desire that the exercise of the profession of the stage, which confers innocent enjoyment on our people, which is calculated to deter them from evil and lead them to virtuous acts, shall not be imputed to them as a crime, or that it should in any way prejudice those who follow the profession.’ And in virtue of this declaration, Louis XIV. permitted Floridor, Sieur de Soulas, when he became an actor, to retain all the rights and privileges of the *noblesse*, and had this act of grace duly registered by *the* Parliament.”

“All this is true,” said Madame Denain;




“but there remains the fact that if this young child goes on the stage, she, in the event of illness, precludes herself from all the consolations of religion, and if that illness should prove fatal, from the sacraments of the Church. Can anything be more terrible than the fate of that gifted artist which was mentioned by Monsieur Hubert—Adrienne Lecouvreur, who was buried in the street at the corner of the Rue de Bourgogne: and there is no power to change the decrees of the Church, even the royal will has to yield to the violence of their prejudices.”

“Yes, there is a power, my dear friend,” replied Mademoiselle Clairon, “which is fast growing up in France, and which even the Church will not be able wholly to ignore—the power of public opinion. I am not an admirer of Monsieur Voltaire, but the manner in which he condemned this shameful persecution has produced great, and will be followed by greater results. I intend when I leave the stage, it will not be a very long time, to devote all my energies

to get rid of these pains and penalties, and long before your pretty *protégée* has arrived even at the maturity of her powers, she will be considered as good a member of the Church as any sister of the Convent of La Prie-Dieu. So we may fairly consider the matter apart from the views expressed by the Church—I don't say apart from religious considerations—for I repeat that the stage should be the school of morals as well as of human nature, and that the study for the stage in its most elevated parts is the study of all that is most refined, tender and true; and the difficulty is to find those who have a vocation for it; and I think your Sophie possesses this gift, and she is just the age to commence her studies—she is seventeen, and no one should appear before the public earlier than that age.”

“But she is so *mignonne* and slight,” said Madame Denain. “No one would guess her more than fifteen; and then she is short, and height must be of great advantage on the stage.”



“Look at my height. I am shorter than Sophie, and it never interfered with my success. Parts which are stamped with dignity seem to add to height. What is much more important than a majestic presence is elegance of figure, self-confidence and self-respect, graceful action ; all these even add dignity and importance to the appearance. But there is plenty of time to enter on these questions if you and Sophie decide favourably. I will undertake her stage education. I may say without vanity

‘ Quoique dans l’été de mes ans,
J’ai su conserver la couronne
Des fleurs qui paraient mon printemps,
Et j’attends les puits d’automne.
Ecoutez la voix,
Et suivez les lois
Que l’expérience vous donne.’

So she shall have all the advantage of my experience, and will profit by my failures.”

Madame Denain was deeply grateful, and felt persuaded that no better career was open to the young girl whom she had rescued from a life

of wretchedness. There were dangers to be encountered on the stage, but what mode of life was exempt from these? it would be her duty and her great anxiety to protect her in the career she now hoped she would adopt.

It was decided that on some informal occasion Sophie should be asked to read a passage from a classic author, so that Mademoiselle Clairon and her friends might judge of her intonation and expression. Sophie, as she watched the stars one by one going out when the grey morning dawned, little thought that this was the eventful night which decided her fate.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAVOURABLE opportunity for Mademoiselle Clairon to form an opinion of Sophie's powers presented itself the next day. It was arranged that the whole party should visit the Palace, drive about the forest, and end the day with an *al fresco* entertainment. Monsieur and Madame Bonval made admirable arrangements for their guests; they acted on the great, generous maxim, "Convier quelqu'un, c'est se charger de son bonheur tout le temps qu'il est sous votre toit." The fact is, they were both entirely unselfish, which is the one condition for being loved in life—"Re-


cevoir est le bonheur des hommes, donner c'est le bonheur des dieux," and in this respect all men have it in their power to become god-like, if it so pleases them.

Monsieur Bonval delighted in making preparations ; he went off early to the spot where they were to assemble later, while the rest of the party were ciceroned over the palace by Madame Bonval. The day was warm and pleasant, and the château looked bright and gay, as in its days of chivalry and romance. At this time there were no tourists to interfere with the associations of ideas. One old porter, with his keys, attended to open the doors of the saloons and galleries. It was strange that many of the party had never before visited the palace, and for such classic students every room and corner afforded subjects of interest, for the history of France from the days of Louis VII. is represented in the architecture and decoration of this glorious pile. No other palace is so rich in traditions. To Fontainebleau, St. Louis and his mother, Blanche

of Castille, loved to retire, to what he termed "ces chers déserts," and it was in the pavilion which still bears his name that, when he thought that he was dying, he addressed these touching words to his son: "Bon fils, fit-il, je te prie que tu te faces aimer au peuple de ton royaume, car, vraelment j'aimeraie mieur qu'un Ecort venist d'Ecosse, gouvernant le peuple du royaume bien et loyalement; que tu le gouvernasse mal à point, et à reproche." But the admirable carvings and grand old memorials of the period which preceded the reign of Francis I. did not interest Sophie so much as the more recent and certainly lighter records of the Renaissance itself, as she lingered in those galleries which Primaticcio adorned and Marot had celebrated in his verse. Madame Bonval, to whom the château was a perfect school of art, pointed out how the rude Gothic had been supplanted by the Italian school. The exquisite frescoes of Rosso, the ceilings of Nicolo dell' Abbate, and the paintings of Leonard da

Vinci, of Raffaele, and Andrea del Sarto showed how much the love of art in monarchs aids in its development, for Francis I. created what was known as the School of Fontainebleau, which, owing its origin to the Italian Renaissance, became a purely French school of art, whose sculptures now adorn the gallery.

The party would have passed the whole day in the palace and gardens—that “jardin délectable,” as it is called by Bernard Palissy—had not Madame Bonval hurried them away for the drive through the forest. They found in the great court carriages and ponies ready, and it afforded Sophie some amusement when she saw the great actors, whom she had regarded with so much awe, making desperate efforts to stop the impetuosity of their wild steeds. They were to drive to the wildest and most picturesque parts of the forest, and to dine at a chalet, called La Roche, and seldom has a happier and more joyous company set out on an expedition. A



holiday, which is frequently a toil to the man of pleasure, is real enjoyment for men of action. The guide they had engaged pointed out each spot of interest, and told many a legend associated with it, which now no traveller has time to listen to. At the "Roche qui pleurt" and the "Fontaine Desirée," Sophie listened to touching stories of lost travellers. They drove through large pine woods, over ground covered with thick mosses, where, Sully says, Henri IV. himself saw the phantom of the Grand Veneur, Robin des Bois, a black horseman, who gallops wildly through the forest in the darkness of night, followed by a pack of hounds in full cry, the rocks and woods echoing with his cry "M'attendez-vous." Mademoiselle Clairon was in the same carriage as Sophie and Madame Denain, and they were both charmed with the eager delight of the young girl, as every turn of the road showed a new point of view, and each stoppage led to a new story. Mademoiselle Clairon won Sophie's heart entirely, and the admiration was reciprocal.

After passing through the Gorge de Franchard, the wildest part of the forest, a desolate expanse of sand with ridges of rocks and solitary pines, where, Dangeau says, Monsieur and Madame hunted the stag in 1687, and thought the prospect more melancholy than any they had ever seen, the party arrived at the Rocher, the abode of "Le Sylvain," the fabled geniis of the forest. Here it was found Monsieur Bonval had made every preparation for the pleasant repast; there was nothing of the lassitude and secret disappointment which is so frequently the result of parties of pleasure, for in the journey of life pleasure falls into no plan; it is a shy companion—as soon as you look into her eyes, she is gone. On the present occasion, every one was happy. One of the company suggested that happy days were so rare. "Then, enjoy them the more," said Monsieur Baron, "remember what the Greek poet said, 'Always and ever endeavour so to live as to enjoy the light of each blue day, knowing it never shall return.' It is idle to waste the

present in vague anticipations of future evil ; de pleurer le mal avant qu'il arrive." And then he added, " Let us, my dear friends, be happy ; let us ever forget slight evils, and banish idle fears. How small do our petty annoyances appear when we see Mademoiselle Clairon enacting Pauline or Mademoiselle Dumesnil in the rôle of Phèdre. Non, mes amis, je crois que l'illusion en toutes choses est charmante, et tout ce que je crains dans ce monde, c'est la vérité, elle est presque toujours triste, et ne laisse aucune consolation après elle. Amis, chères amies ! Vive la bagatelle ! vive la gaieté du cœur !" and he commenced a charming *chanson*,

" Oh ! le soir dans la bise."

There was a refrain in which all the party joined, and Le Vieux Sylvain had never echoed more joyous voices, even in those days which Brantôme describes, when François I. rode in the forest, " avec une armée de courtisans vêtus de soie et brodés d'or, et sa troupe des châtelaines qui ont quittées

leurs provinces pour cette cour enchantée," and the king exclaimed "Qu'une cour sans dames est une année sans printemps, et un printemps sans roses." Many a merry assemblage of the noble, the young, the beautiful, the gay must have flashed in all their pride and brightness through those woodlands and moss-grown glades, but our friends required no such wild excitement. It was pleasant enough on this summer evening listlessly to recline and to listen to Monsieur Brécourt, when with a low but perfect intonation, he recited some of those graceful sonnets which are the valued possession of France :—

" Mignonne, allons voir si la rose
Qui ce matin avait déclose
Sa robe de pourpre au soleil,
A point perdu cette véprée,
Les plis de sa robe pourprée
Et son teint au votre pareil."

It was during one of the pauses after a recital that Mademoiselle Clairon turned to Sophie and asked her to read a few stanzas. Intuitively it

seemed to her that on the success of her effort depended her destiny ; she took the volume, pale, troubled and confused, but her heart was so full of poetry that presently the nervousness left her and she was able to do full justice to the power and merit of the poet. After that, she repeated a passage from Racine, and her triumph was complete.

Monsieur Baron, who, like his great relative in the former reign, was the sovereign of the realm of the Drama for his powers were

“ By no range bounded, by no part repelled,
He all attempted, and in all excelled,”

at once lavished his compliments on Sophie and, ignorant of Madame Denain's wishes, he suggested that she would be the greatest acquisition to the company of the Comédie Française. He then drew a glorious picture of the triumph of histrionic art ; how it appeals to all that is brave, noble, manly and womanly ; how the Drama was too powerful an instrument for good or evil to be neglected or ignored, and how greatly its influence de-

pended on the representations of the Stage. As he spoke, his voice rose and his eye sparkled. "We, the Comédie Française, Mademoiselle, invite you to associate yourself to those who are striving morally and intellectually to elevate the Drama, to make it not merely an amusement, but a great moral teacher, to join our company. We shall, in return for the assistance of your grace and youth and earnestness, afford you the means of becoming a member of what I consider to be a noble profession."

The powerful actor, or, as he now appeared, almost an apostle of a faith, had touched all these chords

" Which vibrate in each human breast
Alike ; but not alike confest."

It was the triumph of conviction.

Madame Denain then admitted that this had been her own view, that it would be a career well suited to her, and the whole of the company vied in their encomiums of the young girl.

On their return to Mont Fleury Sophie re-



mained silent, for her heart was too full for expression. There are moments when there is a great charm in stillness and silence, and rude and harsh seems the voice that intrudes upon our solitude. Who has not felt this in the golden hours of boyhood? when no sympathy can equal the charm of lonely thought. What associations, what possibilities, what triumphs, what fulness of affection crowd on the brain; the unknown world, like the America of Columbus, possesses the heart. In after-years, solitude and loneliness too often only recall vain regrets, withered hopes, and faded memories, and happy are they who have not to add the recollection of unkind words that can never be unsaid, and unkind deeds that can never be undone.

Sophie was silent, but her thoughts were bright with prismatic colouring. What a change had passed over her in a brief period! The desolate outcast had found a home, harshness was exchanged for sweetness and gentleness, and all ungenial intercourse for the society of dear friends. And that day she had been admitted

into a society that enrolled among its names the highest intellects in France; it was enough to fill any heart with gratitude and hope.

CHAPTER VIII.


WHEN Madame Denain and Sophie left Mont Fleury, they did not return to the Rue de la Grille, but to Saint-Germain, and it was arranged that she was to be educated for her new profession by Mademoiselle Clairon and Monsieur Baron,* and there could not have been two

* The nephew of Baron, who was the most remarkable of all the actors who flourished at the latter part of the reign of Louis XIV., was possessed of all the qualities which insure success on the stage.

“ His first triumph was in Molière’s ‘Amour et Psyché,’ His youth, his beauty, and his tender tones fitted him for the part of L’Amour, and made Psyché’s sentiments

more distinguished artists. Mademoiselle Clairon was in the zenith of her fame, and Monsieur Baron had inherited all the talent of his family ;

quite intelligible to the feminine portion of his audience. He played during twenty years with equal power in Tragedy and Comedy, in Corneille and Molière, and Louis XIV. bestowed upon him every possible mark of esteem. He was the favourite of the day, but just as he reached the summit of his popularity he solicited the Royal permission to retire. Louis XIV. formally granted him his freedom at Fontainebleau, where the great actor appeared before him on the 22nd of October, 1691. He was at the time of his retreat the chief actor of the Comédie Française ; he received the pension of one thousand livres due to him as a retiring member of his company, and the King's bounty added a second pension of three thousand livres—about one hundred and sixty pounds, according to the present value of French money. Baron was a proud man, and the obloquy attached to his profession was irritating to his sense of personal dignity. He persevered in his resolution during a period of thirty years, and then, as if it were his function to startle the public, he re-appeared upon the stage in Cor-



he was young, full of energy and promise. Some little time had however to elapse before Sophie could be enrolled as a *pensionnaire*. The other

neille's 'Cinna' on the 16th of March, 1720. This Rip Van Winkle of the drama came back to find most of his former comrades departed, but there remained his Sovereign, and many of his friends at Court, to rejoice in the return of the tragedian who had first sounded the depth of unknown sympathies within them, and taught them the existence of untried passion. The theatre was crowded to excess, and the longing of many hearts was fulfilled. Baron had not lost his power: he had doubled it. His figure was imposing; his voice was completely under his command. He had meditated on his art, and he came back to improve it. The artificial declamation, which was in vogue when he left the stage, had, during his absence, passed all reasonable limits; it had become absurd by exaggeration, and Baron resolved to put an end to its existence. He became the founder of a school of which the principles are at this time held to be the most excellent in dramatic art. He obliged academical rules to give way to Nature, and said, 'Les règles défendent d'élever les bras au-dessus de la tête, mais si la

members of the company had to be consulted, and the name to be submitted to the gentlemen of the Chamber, and to the Controller-General

passion les y porte ils feront bien. La passion en sait plus que les règles.' A courageous innovator, he not only flung his arms fearlessly above his head when passion urged him, but he broke through the cadences of Racine when the pause of emotion did not fall in naturally with the *cæsura* of the line, 'Il rompait la mesure des vers de telle sorte que l'on ne sentait point l'insupportable monotonie des vers Alexandrins,' says Collé, in his description of him. This extraordinary tragedian left the stage for the second and last time on the 3rd of September, 1729. He was playing the part of Venceslas, and as he uttered the line—

‘Si proche du cercueil où je me vois descendre,’

he suddenly swooned, and was carried off the scene by his comrades. He did not long survive this accident, but he found time before his death to make a solemn renunciation of his profession, which he did, no doubt, in order to conciliate the Church and to obtain a decent burial; accordingly he was interred with all proper

of the Ordinary Royal Expenditure.* These, however, were certain in her case to be mere forms.

funeral ceremonies. His portrait hangs in the 'Foyer des Artistes,' not far from that of Le Kain."—*From an admirable article on the Théâtre Français, 'Quarterly Review,' July, 1875.*

* "A l'égard des pièces pour la cour on leur prescira les rôles qu'ils doivent jouer. Fait à Versailles le 18 Juin, 1684."—Previous to the incorporation of the theatres of the Hôtel de Bourgogne, and the Hôtel Guénégaud into the Comédies du Roi, the stage had been, what was styled, 'dans l'état républicain,' and entirely independent. Now what they gained in dignity and importance, they certainly lost in independence. It was a centralised system; and even the small provincial theatres, as well as those of Paris, although they did not receive any assistance from the State, were greatly under its control. There were not more than twelve or fifteen theatrical companies in the whole of France, and these constantly complained of the trouble given them by the local authorities, every mayor in imitation of the Gentlemen of the Chamber, constituting himself a censor and critic.—*Sauval.*

Monsieur Baron had great influence with the Court, and anyone supported by him and Mademoiselle Clairon was sure to be accepted.*

Mademoiselle Clairon arranged to visit Saint-Germain once or twice a week to pass the day in the country, which was a great pleasure to her, and she would then have full opportunity of giving Sophie those instructions which no genius ever can do without. Sophie was to attend the theatre twice a week, when a dancing-master and a singing-master were to aid her natural powers; Monsieur Baron would teach her the range of her voice; thus Sophie, was immediately to

* The Government interfered in the minutest detail connected with this theatre; here was one of the orders issued by the State authorities which claimed a voice even in the distribution of the parts. "Et pour ce qui concerne la troupe en général, et les rôles des pièces à jouer en particulier, aucun des comédiens ne pourra distribuer les dits rôles, ni faire autre chose concernant le théâtre que de leur consentement, et en cas de difficultés ils s'adresseront à leurs supérieurs."

find herself thrown into the busy life of the world behind the scenes.

The time soon passed; but it was a period of almost feverish impatience for Sophie, who looked forward with awe, mingled with curiosity, to all the mysteries to be revealed behind the drop scene, which represented the *Bien Aimé* entering *Sa bonne Ville de Paris*. Once behind the curtain, how strange it all seemed! There was a confusion she never expected to find: the dancing-master in one corner; the chorus practising in another; the stage-manager busy in seeing the stage apparatus furbished up, and putting all the decorations in order; some were arranging the perspective of the scene, others sketching the outlines of the scenery. The majority of the *Mont Fleury* party were there; but they all seemed so practical and occupied, that Sophie could not realize they were the happy and careless people with whom she had passed such pleasant days in delightful excursions. *Mademoiselle Clairon* remarked her surprise, and thought, not unreasonably, that some of the

charm she had anticipated had vanished ; but if such was for a brief moment the case, it passed when Monsieur Baron, taking her into one of the rooms, recited to her a grand passage from Racine ; then again she felt what a grand life it would be if she could, by the expression of noble sayings, arouse deep emotions such as his voice awakened in her heart ; if she were ever able to disseminate generous, exalted feelings with electric force amid the multitude, kindle their souls with sentiments noble and great. The illusion behind the scenes might not be as dazzling as when the curtain rose and revealed the result of all these preparations ; but this is the very prerogative of the drama, that it bursts upon the senses of those who come prepared to receive deep impressions ; but the actors of the Comédie Française were so deeply impressed with their parts, that their inspiration and imagination were in no degree diminished because they were fully acquainted with the slow process by which success is attained.

But although everything was finally decided,

and Sophie felt that the theatre was now her vocation, and the high goal was before her. Madame Denain had moments of distrust; she knew that after all this life, as well as every life, could not be without its anxieties and regrets; the very delicacy and refinement of the young girl's nature made her uneasy; she had been taught by her favourite Petrarch how many dangers are in ambush near the beautiful and true

“ Oimè il bel viso ; oimè il soave sguards !
Oimè il leggiera portamento altro
E oimè il dolce riso.”

Yes, such is life. The warmest, most generous hearts are those that the storms of fate treat most rudely; the very tenderness of certain natures renders them the most susceptible to struggles from without and to sorrow from within. “ Les plus grandes tendresses sont celles qui s'infiltrant, qui aigrissent le plus ”

“ The tender flower
Prized above all the vernal bower,”

is the first to fall from its stem. Madame Denain was now surprised that all this did not occur to her when she first entertained the idea of introducing Sophie to the Society that assembled at Mont Fleury; but in this she was only following the general action of all minds. There are few who, having made a decision, do not afterwards see those possible disadvantages which before it was arrived at seemed to keep themselves in the background. However, it was too late to convey a different impression to Sophie. All she could do was to leave the issue in the hands of a higher Power; of that destiny "qui se lève devant nous, et qui se lève plus grande que nous."

Meanwhile Sophie was bright with happiness and pleasurable excitement; she had no misgivings as to the wisdom of her choice, her only anxiety was to do justice to her kind teachers. The days passed very rapidly. When Mademoiselle Clairon came, they sometimes sat in an arbour at the end of the terrace, which overlooked the river and the great city, very beautiful in the

light, unclouded atmosphere. Now, even when left alone, she never felt the sadness which formerly quenched all the light of her spirits. There was a small garden abounding with those flowers she knew and loved so well—for flowers had been the companions of her young hours, and at the same time their solace. She possessed a little volume called "*La Famille des Fleurs*," written at a time when flowers were known by their old and graceful names; *Les Pensées*, *Trésor d'Amour*, *Belle de Nuit*, *Mignonette*, *La Reine des Prés*, and another sister sovereign in the realm of fragrance, *La Reine Marguerite*. Sophie knew every flower; she had studied them daily at one of those flower-markets which are found in all parts of Paris, and are one of its exceptional charms. She used to lay in her stock of bouquets for the day there. When the owner of her favourite stall learnt to take an interest in the fair young girl, he gratified her by telling her stories of the spots where they grew. "*Les fleurs ont des amitiés et jalousies les unes*

pour les autres ; aussi bien que les créatures aimables et aimantes," he said. The old gardener and his little customer really began to think that there was a language of flowers, and that some were sensitive not only in name but in their nature. Such associations in early youth tended to fill her mind with graceful impressions. Thus she found in this garden a constant source of interest ; everything for her was fresh and full of charm ; objects frequently owe their interest to the mind of the observer, for we are told that even beauty is the lover's gift, and

" In our life alone doth nature live ;"

but to her life was enjoyment—the pleasant twilight, the starry heavens, the roar of the distant city and its leagues of light, the stillness of the night, or its gentle murmurs and voices. She had a song in her mind, and all nature seemed to harmonise with it.

But Sophie was not permitted to pass her time in dream-life and wonderland. Mademoiselle Clairon taught her that to succeed on

the stage required something more than enthusiasm and sentiment; that much study and thought were necessary, and, above all, an intimate acquaintance with the great masters of the Drama; and the principles she laid down were those which have proved invaluable guides to the profession. She told Sophie that to represent the great characters either in Tragedy or Comedy without an experienced guide is impossible. "How frequently have I wasted all my time in useless, aimless efforts, when every moment was of the utmost importance to me, for whoever hopes to attain eminence in any, but especially in dramatic, art, has no time to lose; for instance, what study does it not require to distinguish between irony and disdain, and between disdain and contempt, warmth and undue excitement, impatience and anger, anger and fear, fear and terror—all these distinctions have to be carefully studied. What almost imperceptible gradations must there be in the tone of the voice to express all the subtleties of affection, of nature, of humanity! What efforts


and exertions to attain the height of the representation of terror, of misery, of ruin ! What precision there must be in the ideas and in their expression to reason on the stage in a calm and accurate manner, without being too cold or too familiar ! This, I think, is the most difficult of all, and to be quiet, simple, true, and natural is the greatest proof of talent. My studies guided me to the paths which have led others to the highest perfection of dramatic power, but I found difficulties which beset me on all sides, and, after all, I feel I have only been able to gather a few flowers, while the palm still remains for some one to seize ; my happiness is that I am able to give the results of my experience to others," and then she added : "One thing must never be forgotten—that for the actor all the world must be a stage ; he should carry into his ordinary life the manner required for the particular part on which his abilities are for the time fixed ; for nothing is so important as to make a character a habit. For instance, if people only see in me a *bour-*

geoise during twenty hours of the day, it is certain I shall only be a *bourgeoise* when I appear as Agrippina. My expression, my manner will, in spite of any momentary effort, become common-place. I shall not possess, except at rare intervals, the grandeur and majesty demanded for the part; I do not hesitate to say that never aiming at a higher place in society than my lot has been cast in, I have made it a duty never to do any act or utter a word inconsistent with the noble natures I have been called on to represent. I am well aware that this has been ridiculed by those who failed themselves to rise to the greatness of the occasion; they pretended that I had always the regal manner of the Queen of Carthage. They thought to distress me; on the contrary, they did me a great service. It proved to me that I had succeeded in my object, and that the task I had imposed on myself in the world, and even in my own room, had been attended with success. And I felt this good result in a freedom from the effort and tension

of mind which others have to bring to their parts while they are before the public.*

“Next in importance, is to listen to every criticism. No matter from what quarter it

* Mademoiselle Clairon, in her “Notes on the Stage,” urges this point strongly; but, at the same time, indicates the pain of such intensity of thus concentrating the faculties. She says: “Ce n’est pas assez pour un acteur d’étudier son rôle. Il faut qu’il étudie l’ouvrage entier, afin d’en masquer le faible, d’en faire sortir les beautés, et de subordonner son personnage à l’ensemble de la pièce; mais dans tout ce que je viens de dire, le plus terrible n’est pas encore prononcé, c’est l’indispensable nécessité d’être continuellement pénétré des événemens les plus tristes et les plus tragiques. L’acteur qui ne se les rend pas personnels, n’est qu’un écolier qui répète sa leçon; mais celui qui se les approprie, et dont les larmes constatent les recherches profondes, déchirantes de ses études, et l’oubli de sa propre existence, est certainement un être misérable, et j’ose avouer qu’il faut une force plus qu’humaine pour bien jouer la tragédie plus de dix ans.”—*Mademoiselle Clairon ‘Sur la Déclamation Théâtrale.’*



comes, it is always valuable, for it tends to make you study your own powers. Happy is the actor whom the public take sufficient interest in to criticise him, if he has not the ridiculous pretension to think himself infallible.

“All this, you say, is difficult. I admit it. The profession is a great and a difficult one. Can you imagine it otherwise? A profession that demands a liberal education, knowledge of human nature, profound studies, elevation of mind, which is supposed to add new charms and varied beauties to the grand thoughts of the master-spirits of age. Yes, whoever would enter upon this career must bring to it study, great appreciation of the beauties in every form, and, above all, habits of unremitting industry. These are some of the conditions of success.


“Never forget the importance of every movement. The Athenian orator insisted on action as absolutely essential; for when eloquence is deficient in suitable action, words lose their power and their charm. If this is true as regards the orator, it is still more so for the actor. The orator

speaks for himself, but the actor has to represent another person and portray every emotion. He must, therefore, have his imagination always under his control; he is not permitted to invent; he has to remember that he is performing, as it were, a part for another, and yet to do it so earnestly as to almost lose sight of his own identity."

By the kind efforts of Mademoiselle Clairon and Monsieur Baron, Sophie made rapid progress. The days and weeks passed quickly, and her studies were so advanced that the moment when she was to appear on the stage became a subject for discussion. Sophie herself was all for prolonging the period of noviciate, not to appear as

"The hasty product of a day,
But the well ripened fruit of wise delay."

But Monsieur Baron thought that she was so much advanced that she could not only appear with the Comédie Française, but could even take a leading part; how frequently a seeming




accident decides the most important issues. It had come to the knowledge of the King that a remarkable *débutante* was soon to appear, and His Majesty directed Monsieur Falloux, the Superintendent of the Studies of the Pensionnaires, to express his wish that she should take a part in the performance at Versailles, which the Court was about to inhabit. Although the anticipation of such a possibility had never been absent day or night from her thoughts, the summons of Monsieur Falloux, suggested as it was by the opinion of all who had seen her rehearse, filled her with apprehension. Madame Denain wished for her to have more time, and pleaded her youth as an excuse; but Mademoiselle Clairon had appeared a year earlier, and every suggestion for delay which she made was evaded. The die was cast; and it was very difficult to disobey the royal wishes.

“But,” said poor Sophie, “surely I need not appear for the first time before the Court. Can nothing be done?”

“I should be very grieved, Mademoiselle, if any should appear before His Majesty unless I was well assured they were worthy of the honour; and it is because I am well assured, not only by my own observation, but by that of others, that you will reflect lustre on the Comédie Française, that I must urge you to accept His Majesty’s command. The Court returns to Versailles next week for His Majesty’s *fête*, which falls on the Wednesday in the subsequent week, and a *gala* performance is ordered. It will be a great epoch in your future life, Mademoiselle, to have appeared for the first time in the presence of His Majesty.”

And thus it was decided, and, strange to say, the decision once made, Sophie’s mind was relieved. She worked with more assiduity than ever, and the constant occupation made her forget her anxiety. Then she accompanied Madame Denain to Versailles when she made an excursion there to engage an apartment, for it was understood that the Court would remain for three months.



Versailles, that marvellous creation of Louis XIV., sprang into life out of an ungrateful, damp and melancholy plain. For what reasons could such a site have been selected for a palace that was to rival all others in Europe, and to become its centre of attraction? It was said that Saint-Germain, with its magnificent but melancholy apartments, was associated in the King's mind with the early troubles of his youth; from the terrace he could see the capital which contained the fickle population it was his destiny to govern, and it gave him a desire to find a more cheerful residence, out of view of the citizens he had learned to mistrust; or it may have been the very difficulty and extravagance of the undertaking that stimulated its accomplishment; perhaps a superstitious feeling drew his attention to the spot on which Louis XIII. had erected a pavilion where he used to pass days in solitude and meditation. Whatever the cause, not in vain was it that the grand ideas of Le Nôtre, Mansard and Lebrun appealed successfully to the love of the splendours and dazzling

magnificence which was an instinct in the young prince, and it was resolved to change the marshy plain into a fairy-land of beauty, to turn the course of rivers, to level hills and conquer nature, and the original small windmill where Louis XIII. rested when benighted; was to be converted into a palace, exquisite in its details, as it was marvellous in its conception.

When Le Nôtre produced his vast plan for the improvements round the Château, which Leveau designed, and Lebrun was impatient to decorate, the King's determination not to embarrass the finances forsook him. One thing, however, the King insisted on, that the modest residence where Louis XIII. sought for some repose from the then terrible exigencies of his public life, should be preserved; And therefore the new erection had to be planned so as to form a part of the old.


Once commenced, the rapidity of execution could scarcely keep pace with the royal impatience, and, as by magic, the palace sprang into existence, and not only the Sovereign, but the

Princes of the Blood, the Grand Officers of the Household, the Secretaries of State, the Ministers of the Crown, the Gentlemen of the Royal Guard, all found themselves lodged in this city of palaces. And here Louis XIV. delighted to reside, to live in those vast galleries, which seemed to reflect his own greatness, and where he imagined that the Monarchy was more secure from the agitations of the people than in Paris.*

As so many days were to elapse before the arrival of the Court, Madame Denain and Sophie had time to visit all the wonders of the place. They traversed the apartments, rich in their associations, and in which so many sad and tearful scenes were hereafter to be enacted ; but the chief interest was, as may be supposed, in the theatre, where her destiny was to be decided. It was

* "Le palais de Versailles est un grand poème national. Chaque salle représente un chant, ou une strophe de cette glorieuse épopée, enfin cette union qu'on admire partout de la richesse et de l'élégance suivant l'expression d'un poète national."

only the second year that this beautiful part of the Palace had been completed by Gabriel and decorated by Durameau and Briard; until then one of the large galleries had been used as a theatre, but here was a stage worthy of the distinguished performers, and of the presence of Majesty. Sophie might well think that if it looked so imposing even in the light of day, what must it be with all the brilliancy of the illumination at night, and the imposing grandeur of the Court. As she trod the stage, she trembled at the idea that in three days she was to stand there the observed of all. She had confidence in herself, in the judgment of others, and concealed her emotion as well as she could from Madame Denain, but not the less was she alarmed at the ordeal she was to pass through.



CHAPTER IX.

THE interest which Louis XV. took in the Comédie Française was greater than that which had been manifested by Louis XIV. during his declining years; for, after his marriage with Madame de Maintenon, whether it was that all plays became associated in the King's mind with the name of Scarron,* or that the influence of

* The anecdote is told by Louis Racine, and confirmed by Mathieu Marais, that on one occasion Boileau so far forgot the King's feelings, Madame de Maintenon's presence, and all courtly etiquette, as to speak of "les méchantes comédies de Scarron." The King with great

Madame de Maintenon was opposed to the Stage, but the "Troupe du Roi" were seldom summoned to play before the Court after the death of the Queen. In private, however, Louis XIV. took every opportunity of showing his consideration

presence of mind, said, "It would appear that Boileau only esteems Molière." Boileau, instead of excusing himself, replied, "Sire, I think he is the only one who can write a good comedy."

A similar anecdote is told of Racine, but it is not so well authenticated. The great poet was accustomed to read any new productions before Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon. One day the King asked him what he thought of the literature of the period. Racine replied: "It was a great improvement on the time when such works as Scarron's sold." No sooner were the words spoken than he was conscious of his terrible blunder. Any excuse, or apology, was impossible; the King and Madame de Maintenon looked at each other, and remained silent. After a long pause, Racine rose and left the Royal presence; but he was never again invited to read at Court, although his pension was continued.

for the performers, and they enjoyed access to the royal presence when even important Officers of State were waiting for an audience. Dancourt was one of those whom the Sovereign delighted to honour, and yet he was by no means possessed of the highest merit; he was a combination, only too common at that time, of devotion and licence. The King, however, showed him great favour; on one occasion, when he was reading before His Majesty a play it was proposed to act, he was seized by a sudden faintness, when Louis XIV., without calling for any assistance, opened the window and gave him restoratives. On another occasion, the King accompanied him as he left the presence-chamber, conversing in a familiar manner as they passed down the line of courtiers, when suddenly Dancourt slipped on the polished floor; the King seized his arm, exclaiming, "*Prenez garde, Dancourt, vous allez tomber!*" then, turning to the astonished courtiers, he added, "*En vérité, Messieurs, cet homme parle bien!*"

The state performances then were very few,

Louis XIV. patronising and protecting the actors rather than the Stage; so much so that the Théâtre Français was placed under the direction of the Grande Dauphine, and at no period since the foundation of the Society was its existence in greater danger—the interference on the part of the Princess and of the First Gentlemen of the Chamber became so incessant and harassing. On one occasion she insisted on an unknown actor taking a principal part in “Phèdre;” he proved a failure, and the public disapprobation was loudly expressed. Yet the next season the same actor was permitted to perform Gros-Réné in the “Dépit Amoureux,” and this performance proved no improvement on “Phèdre.”

The beauty and grace of an actor were of greater importance to the royal censor and critic than his ability; thus, Dauvilliers, who was of pre-eminent merit in all pathetic and tender parts, who had, more than any other actor, “les larmes dans la voix,” was painfully disconcerted, the first night he appeared before the Court, by the

Dauphine, in a voice loud enough to be heard on the stage and by the audience, exclaiming that he was too plain for sentiment. The same remark being repeated on another occasion, his sensitive nature gave way, he lost his reason, and was subsequently confined at Charenton, where he was carefully tended by the "Frères de la Charité," one of those institutions which was on the list of the charities supported by the Théâtre Français.

The interference grew quite intolerable when the most eminent performers were subjected to Her Royal Highness's caprices; even Baron and Raisin, the one unrivalled in tragedy, the other in comedy, were, for some slight or imaginary cause of offence, ordered to withdraw from the Society, and the authority of the King was even invoked to enforce this order. It was represented to His Majesty that the dismissal of these distinguished actors might end in the withdrawal of the whole Company, so this order was not enforced. It was, however, soon replaced by another, equally objectionable to the Company:

an author named Visé had won the good graces of the Dauphine, and she insisted that all his plays should be brought out at the Théâtre Français, and they were compelled to perform one or two of his earliest pieces ; but when he brought them a very inferior production, "l'Aventurier," and urged it on their acceptance, it was unhesitatingly and unanimously refused. Visé then wrote to La Grange :—"Yesterday some personages of great importance came and inquired if the Company positively declined to act my play? My-reply was 'that such was the case, and I could only suppose that they did not think it a good one, when I was told that admirable judges were of opinion that I could not write an inferior play.' The same evening this circumstance was narrated in a *salon* where all the most distinguished courtiers were assembled, and it was decided to speak to the Chief of the Direction, the Grande Dauphine ; my friend begged that the subject might not be mentioned until he had communicated with me, and I have urged him to say nothing for the present." And then,

after this hint, he ended by demanding "that the play should be produced at once."

The Company replied very courteously, but firmly, "that it was impossible for them to comply with his request." So certain was he of their giving way, even after this distinct refusal, that he publicly announced its appearance in a very original notice, expressing his conviction "that the success of his play would entirely depend on the amount of attention the audience gave to it," and he protested, in anticipation, against the decision of the public, which, he was sure, would be influenced by the ignorant and envious. Visé had the merit of foresight on both points, for the Comédie Française were compelled to accept his piece, and it was hopelessly condemned the very first night.

The Dauphine's interest in the theatre was marked by the greatest inconsistencies and extravagances, and it required all the energy of Baron, La Grange, and the other great leaders of the company, to prevent its ruin. They were ordered to Versailles or Fontainebleau at her


pleasure, no matter to how great inconvenience the performers were subjected, and then on their arrival the performances were postponed on the most frivolous excuses. In 1682 they received instructions to proceed to Versailles to act "Cinna" and "Crispin Médecin," and then were told that the play was countermanded because the "Court was cavalcading round the Grand Canal." Again in the Winter, when the cold was so intense in Paris that all the theatres were closed, they had again to start for Versailles to give the "Cid" and "Le Ballet Extravagant," and on their arrival found the Court had put on mourning for that day, having suddenly remembered it was the anniversary of the queen-mother's death; nor were they more fortunate when they were to act "Agamemnon," a tragedy by M. l'Asséyeu; they were again dismissed, because Monseigneur was boating on the canal, and the Grande Dauphine was reposing. On the other hand, there were occasions when it might have been more decorous for this remarkable stage directress to have postponed the play. Dangeau

says that while the Dauphine was at confession one evening, on a sudden her confessor was seized with trembling, and fell dead at her feet. "Monseigneur," to use Dangeau's own words, "pria Madame la Dauphine, pour effacer le triste image de son confesseur mourant à ses pieds, d'aller à la comédie, où elle avait résolu de ne point aller, voulant faire demain ses dévotions, et elle y alla par complaisance pour Monseigneur."

But as some compensation for all the inconveniences arising from the members of the Comédie Française being in the strictest interpretation of the term "His Majesty's Servants," for their names were all inscribed on the State establishment, and, as has been seen, their engagements were subject to the approval of the Gentlemen of the Chamber, the company were treated in the most liberal manner. Whenever they were summoned to Saint-Germain or Versailles, or even to Chambord, numerous carriages and relays of horses were provided for them, and in addition to their usual salaries they were

paid at the rate of a thousand écus a month, besides all their expenses being defrayed by the Sovereign—even at every performance given in Paris, when none of the Court were present, they were allowed a certain quantity of wood, wine, and wax-lights, and at Saint-Germain a torch weighing two pounds, which was all brought to them with great regularity by the officers of the “fruiterie,” whose registers contain all the receipts, with the addition of twenty-five crowns a day for table-money.

The correspondence of this period shows that, while the King retired from all personal interference with the theatre, he never changed his views as to the importance of the Stage as the means of the education of the people; and the interest which His Majesty took in the success of the Théâtre Français was never more earnestly manifested than on the death of Monseigneur, in 1711, who was known as the Grand Dauphin. The Duc de Bourgogne, the pupil of Fénelon, then became Dauphin. It was well-known that this Prince disliked the theatre, not



that he had been brought up with this prejudice by his eminent tutor, who entirely differed in his views as to the stage with the Bishop of Meaux, for he himself had proposed two prizes for the two best essays, the one on the tragedies, and the other on the comedies of the period; but the retiring sensitive nature of the Prince led him to avoid all public appearances, and he therefore was never present at any of the Court representations. Monsieur Sainte-Beuve, among other anecdotes, to show the character of the Dauphin, says,

“It is well known that, on the death of the Grand Dauphin, the Comédie Française memorialized the Prince to honour them with his protection, and that his reply was decided: he said that they must never calculate on his support, and although it was not in his power to prevent them acting at Court, he would on no account, by his presence, add to their influence.”

This was expressed in the spirit of Bossuet, and it is evident that, “but for the determination of the King, the Théâtre Français


would have ceased to exist as a State Institution. But the creation of Richelieu and of the Grand Monarque, in his earlier days, was not to be overthrown; and thus the subsidies, gratifications, and favours, shown the illustrious company, remained unchanged, and the general public manifested, by the interest which they took in this theatre in preference to any other, that the Sovereign and his great ministers were right when they paid no heed to the denunciations of Bossuet, or to the ecclesiastical censures which were fulminated against the Stage and its supporters.

In reviewing the position of the Théâtre Français at this date, it is not only the State support and the influence of the Crown that have to be considered. No amount of subsidy or courtly patronage could have sustained such a company, unless by its own merit it had won the public approval; not even the Grand Monarque, in his most glorious days, when the rays of his device, the sun, beamed on Richelieu's various academies and institutions, would have

sufficed to maintain them but for their intrinsic worth, nor even was it sufficient to command the suffrages of the aristocratic classes; for no theatre is independent of the public opinion and favour. The incomparable dramatic literature of the seventeenth century is a clear indication that the general public appreciated the conceptions of the great dramatists. Corneille, Racine, Molière were the creation of the spirit of the age, the former representing its chivalrous sentiment, the latter holding up to ridicule the prevalent follies of the time. The "Cid" would have found no admirers amid a practical commercial nation, and there must have been many a well-known Tartuffe, George Dandin and Monsieur Jourdain, before Molière could have drawn his inimitable characters; but if the public sentiment originally inspired these productions it is certain that the public in return received a higher education by attending these admirable performances. It is remarkable that this public opinion was principally formed by the upper and the humble classes of society.

Sauval says that habit, prejudice, and the influence of the clergy kept the middle classes from the theatre. It was generally understood that not only the clergy, but the magistracy, lawyers, even doctors, should not, from the importance and gravity of their professions, be seen at the play; while at the same time it was with great satisfaction that they admitted into their intimate society the members of the Comédie Française, whom the King treated with such great consideration. The mere circumstance of their being pensioned by the Crown, at once gave them an exceptional position, "For," says Chappuzeau, "the pension of so great a monarch would render even an insignificant man illustrious."

If something of the influence of the Théâtre Français was diminished at the close of the reign of Louis XIV., it revived, as we have seen, in that of Louis XV., who, wherever he resided, was in general accompanied by the Comédie, as a part of the Royal suite. The King's interest in the Stage was not unfortunately of the same nature as that of Louis XIV, who possessed a



great and just appreciation of the dramatists that illustrated the age. Louis XV. regarded the stage as an amusement, and was comparatively indifferent what plays were performed before him, so long as they relieved the tedium of the hour; thus comedy and farce too frequently took the place of the classic drama, as better adapted to the atmosphere of a gay Court, and even Molière was superseded by the lighter pieces of Dancourt, such as the “*Diable Boiteux*,” or the “*Vert-Galant*.” This change, not indeed in the public, but in the Court, was much regretted by the chief artists, for no national drama was ever founded or sustained by comedy. Aristotle’s definition of tragedy and comedy has been frequently quoted, that “if tragedy raises men above nature, comedy sinks them below it.” The object of the Stage should be to represent the noble and generous attributes of men, and not their mean or inferior qualities. A great many plays presented at this epoch to the Comédie Française, were at once rejected, even in opposition to influential courtiers; and it

was resolved by Mademoiselle Clairon, Mademoiselle Dumesnil, Lekain, Baron, and the other important members of the company, to resist as far as possible the innovations which the Gentlemen of the Chamber were endeavouring to introduce into the management of the theatre.

At the same time Mademoiselle Clairon and her friends were sensible that there were some changes necessary to meet the spirit of the age; there was a growing taste for show and magnificence, which, as has already been observed, had formerly only been required on great State occasions, for it was considered the peculiar privilege of the Théâtre Français to depend on the merit of the performers, and not on their accessories; but time and events are stronger than traditions, and even the Comédie Française had in certain respects to defer to the taste of the day.

Mademoiselle Clairon had always held a different opinion from that of her associates, and thought that the actors ought to appear in the costume of the period which the play repre-

sents, not only, as she expressed it in her 'Mémoires,' "to add to the illusion, but because accuracy of costume assists the actor in the performance of his part." It must certainly have appeared very unnatural to see the plays of Corneille and Racine represented by performers in the gala Court-dresses of Louis XIV., Sertorius and Pompey appearing in coats with gold-embroidered seams and covered with lace, with a wide richly-embroidered scarf, from which a sword was suspended, and wearing a hat with drooping plumes! It could not have added to the desired effect when Augustus placed a laurel wreath on the top of his enormous, full, curled wig, whose lappets fell down to his waist; and yet the great dramatists of France never had the satisfaction of seeing their noble creations represented except in this unreal manner. Orestes, the Cid, Cæsar, Horace, Cinna might have been courtiers attending the *levée* or the *petit-coucher* of the King. At that time no one seemed to see how much this

weakened the effect of the grand sentiments the heroes had to express.

It was very fortunate for the Théâtre Français that Mademoiselle Clairon, Lekain, and others felt that the time had arrived when the theatre could scarcely maintain its high reputation by a too strict adherence to all the old traditions and what was considered the classic rules of the Stage. At the time when the whole relations of the Comédie Française with the government were brought before the Council of State, it was decided that this question of costume should also be fully considered.* It

* Mademoiselle Clairon, in her "Reflexions Morales," gives a charming personal anecdote as to the importance of dress, "I had attained forty without, I fondly imagined, showing any indications of age; but one day when I particularly wished to make a favourable impression in a new piece, I desired my maid to bring me a bonnet of the latest fashion, I tried it on; but on looking in the glass, I was disappointed with my appearance. I sent for other bonnets which were adapted to the freshness of youth, but the result was the same. I dismissed

was felt that, great as were the actors of the early age of Louis XIV., comprising the illustrious names of La Grange, Hubert, Dupin, De Croisy, Verneuil, all of them worthy of the parts they were called upon to perform, still they laboured under a great disadvantage by this absence of appropriate costume. The long dialogues became wearisome, at times almost unmeaning, when neither scenes nor dresses were considered necessary to assist the illusion. There was something ridiculous in Cleopatra wearing a grand panier covered with the richest brocade, and Polyeucte in a *juste-au-corps*. Even in the

my maid, locked the door, put my face close to the glass; alas! it was as I feared, there were the lines on my brow, on my cheeks, and my neck, my teeth had lost their brilliant whiteness, my lips their freshness, my eyes their sparkling light. No, my maid and my bonnets were not to blame, it was Time! I burst into tears, and was in grief for many days. Then I turned my attention to the adaptation of my dress to this change, and I found I lost nothing of the public favour, for criticism and envy are always disarmed before the absence of pretension.

time of Louis XIV., this inconsistency had been criticised, and the attractions of the smaller theatres vaunted to the disparagement of the Comédie Française. Loret, so early as 1658, invited the Court to a gayer theatre, and

“ Ceux qui font grand cas des spectacles,
Qui pourraient passer pour miracles,
Il faut qu'ils aillent tout de bon
En l'Hôtel du Petit Bourbon.
On ne peut rien voir maintenant
Si pompeux ni si surprenant,
Des hydres, dragons et démons,
Des mers, des fôrets, et des monts,
Des décorations brillantes,
Des musiques plus que charmantes,
De superbes habillements,
La grâce et les traits enchanteurs
Des actrices et des acteurs,
Flattant les yeux et les oreilles,
Ne sont que le quart des merveilles,
Et j'en jure foi de mortel
Que l'on voit au susdit Hôtel.”

Loret adds that the King, with the whole Court,

did accept the invitation, and were greatly gratified with the performance.

Mademoiselle Clairon overcame the opposition she met with in her own circle, and about the middle of last century this great innovation commenced at the Comédie Française; but it could not be accomplished all at once, and for some time a greater absurdity than a classic piece enacted in modern Court dresses existed, which was that some of the characters appeared in the dress of the period represented in the play, conversing with others in the dress of the period as represented at the Court. Cornélie, in the robes of a Roman matron, exclaiming

“ César, prends garde à toi,
Ta mort est résolue,”

and Cæsar, magnificently attired, with the powder falling from his wig on his shoulder, replying

“ O cœur vraiment Romain,
Et digne du héros qui vous donna la main.”

However, this incongruity could not last long,

and Mademoiselle Clairon had the satisfaction of seeing before she retired from the stage that the view which she, more especially than any other of the company, with the exception of Lekain, took of this change from the old custom of the Théâtre Français was at last universally approved.

Another danger menaced the Théâtre Français at this period—that from which few societies are entirely exempt, least so those societies of which ladies renowned for their charms form a part. Not only Mademoiselle Clairon, but also Dumesnil, Doligny, and others, were remarkable for their beauty and grace,* and

* In the “Musée de la Comédie Française,” amongst other most interesting and admirable portraits is a print of Mademoiselle Clairon, in the costume of ‘Medea;’ the frame is of exquisite workmanship, of carved wood and gold, and has the inscription: “Donné par le Roi à Mademoiselle Clairon.”

Bachaumont mentions this picture in his ‘Mémoires;’ he says in 1764, “Every one is going to see this new print of Mademoiselle Clairon; it is engraved from the

jealousies, not in the vulgar mode of rivalry in the affections, which is the usual expression of jealousy in ordinary societies, but in stage

portrait of M. Van-Loo, by MM. Cars and Beauvarlet, the King's engravers. She is represented as 'Medea,' as she appears in the fifth act of this tragedy, the moment that Medea kills her children, and flees in her car after having shown them to Jason. The engraving was paid for by the King, as well as the magnificent frame. Monsieur Nougaret has written the following verses to be fixed at the foot of the portrait.

“ ‘ Cette actrice immortelle enchaîne tous les cœurs,
Ses grâces, ses talents lui gagnent les suffrages
Du critique sévère et des vraies connaisseurs ;
Et de nos jours bien des auteurs
Lui doivent le succès qui suivit leurs ouvrages.’

“ Bachaumont adds that in 1750, Garrick, ‘the greatest actor in England,’ as he styles him, passed some days in Paris, and witnessed, with admiration, Mademoiselle Clairon’s performance. So struck was he with this remarkable actress, that he employed Monsieur Gravelot to make a drawing of her, in which she is represented with all the attributes of her art; while Corneille, Racine, Crébillon and Voltaire are offering her a crown, and underneath are the lines,

rivalry, would arise from time to time. Even Mademoiselle Clairon was not exempt from these. When it was intended to bring out a remarkable

‘J’ai prédit que Clairon illustrait en scène,
Et mon espoir n’a point été déçu,
Elle a couronné Melpomène,
Melpomène lui rend ce qu’elle en a reçu.’


“The verses are by Garrick, who had originally predicted her great success.”

This ‘Musée de la Comédie Française’ is one of the most interesting collections to be found in Paris. It contains portraits of the most illustrious performers painted by their compeers. There may be found the admirable works of that remarkable School of Art which dipped the pencil in the light of each expression, and could pourtray the inspiration of the minute such as a Mignard, Largillière, Van-Loo, Mathieu, David, Gérard, Ingrès and Isabey, in painting; Caffieri, Lemarque, Houdon, David d’Angers, in sculpture, who may be studied in the perfection of their Art in this collection. The Théâtre Français possesses not only works of infinite value to the History of the Drama, but the most perfect productions of Art in France.

piece, called "Le Comte d'Essex," Mademoiselle Clairon asked who was to take the part of Elizabeth. Madame Dumesnil said it was intended for her. "I, then, will act the Duchess." "That is my part," exclaimed Mademoiselle Hus, "and I intend to keep it." "Then," said Mademoiselle Clairon, "there is nothing but the *confidante* left for me ; and I am perfectly satisfied with it." At the first, no one believed it possible that the great actress of the day would accept the humblest part in a play, but Mademoiselle Clairon anticipated the success of her scheme, and that her vengeance would be complete. Mademoiselle Hus was very feeble in the grand character she had undertaken, but in the part of the humble *confidante*, as performed by Mademoiselle Clairon, every word produced its effect. The magnificent Duchess was received with ridicule, while each time the simple *confidante* crossed the stage she was enthusiastically applauded. Well might a spectator, who was present and unacquainted with stage disputes, express his astonishment that the only actress

who was received with approbation was the one who had nothing to say. Mademoiselle Hus never forgave the triumph which her own vanity had given to Mademoiselle Clairon, and she became the centre of a party formed to oppose the great influence which the eminent actress exercised over the company. There were few nobler natures than Mademoiselle Clairon's, but the stage is not the best school for unselfishness. There is the natural desire to select the character to which performers think themselves entitled. Another misunderstanding occurred between Mademoiselle Clairon and Mademoiselle Doligny, When a friend of the former's, Monsieur Saint-Foix, the author of several light and agreeable plays, wrote a letter reflecting on Mademoiselle Clairon in a paper of Fréron's, he learnt that in those days it was not wise to attack anyone who possessed influence at the Court. A *lettre de cachet* and a few weeks at Fort l'Evêque afforded Fréron time to reconsider and correct his dramatic criticisms.


Such was the position of the Comédie Fran-



çaise at the time that Sophie was to make her appearance, and Mademoiselle Clairon looked forward to that day with as much anxiety and interest as her pupil. Here was no occasion for jealousy or rivalry ; rather Sophie's merit, if recognised, would be the result of her own instructions. Mademoiselle Clairon felt that, while teaching so much, she had herself gained by her intercourse with so guileless and simple a nature as Sophie's, for the healthiest condition of all art is when the acquired and artificial can be shaken off, and the taste is renewed in its simplicity. The cottage at Saint-Germain was well adapted for those studies which demand contemplation ; none require it more than those which attempt to delineate, whether on canvas or on the stage, the conceptions of great minds. And now the moment had arrived when the result of these varied studies was to be brought before the public. The selection of the part in which Sophie was to appear was a proof of the interest which the King took in the rising genius of the company, and his desire to maintain it in all its consideration and old privileges.


CHAPTER X.

THE eventful day dawned, and if sunshine was a good omen, it was a bright and cheerful morning, and Sophie felt more courage than she had anticipated ; for, as is always the case, dangers and difficulties, like hills, diminish as we approach them, the imagination adding the force of its own terrors to the real causes of fear. There was one subject which had occupied a certain amount of her attention, her dress ; she had heard how much importance the King attached to the appropriateness of costume,




and on a first appearance any defect was not likely to pass unnoticed. Sophie, was to act the part of Chimène, in the "Cid." A great effort for a first appearance, and requiring the change of costume and appearance from the happy, gay pledged bride to the daughter mourning for her father. Mademoiselle Clairon undertook that the dresses selected should be well adapted to Sophie and to the part. So her anxiety on this point was at rest. The King and the Court were to arrive that morning, and already the soldiers were beginning to line the Rue de Paris, in which Madame Denain had taken a small house. When Sophie went to a little church in the Rue de l'Evêque, and, apart from the rising tumult of the town, prayed for a blessing on her new undertaking, the orphan placed herself under the guardianship of the Father of the fatherless, within the pale of the Church, which was, alas ! too soon to cast her forth. As she was leaving the Church, the roll of drums and the clash of arms announced the arrival of the King, and she had just time

to reach the house before the *cortège* passed. Sophie had never before seen a royal procession of such grandeur, and gazed with wonder on its pomp and splendour. For, up to 1789, the magnificence of the French Court was maintained as if no rude hands were so soon to be raised to stain its ermine. This was the first time that the King had visited Versailles since his life was in danger, and the whole neighbourhood poured into the town to bid him welcome; guards lined the streets, the Cent Suisses, the favoured corps nearest the person of the Sovereign, headed the procession in their halberds, ruffs, and white-plumed hats; then the gentlemen of the Body-Guard—brilliant with their gold embroidery and glittering cuirasses, preceded the long line of carriages filled with the ladies and gentlemen of the Court; last came the King, of whom it might truly be said that he had the pleasantest manner in the world, and always had a smile. He had inherited the pre-eminent courtesey of Louis XIV. It may be well imagined with what sensations Sophie watched the presence



of him before whom she was that evening to appear. All the reality of the greatness of the occasion rushed on her mind, and it was with a sinking heart she saw the pageant enter the great courts of the palace, and the gates close upon it.

It was early in the evening when Madame Denain and Sophie arrived at the theatre. The audience had already commenced taking their seats, and, shortly after, a blaze of light illuminated the decorations on which the first masters of art in France had been employed; but Sophie had little time for observation, the moment was drawing near. Arms were presented, the band played *Vive Henri IV.*, and a loud, ringing cheer announced the King's arrival; when he entered the magnificent state-box, the audience, the *élite* of the Court, burst forth into repeated acclamations of welcome and greeting—it was a shout of real affection for the Monarch restored to the love of the people after his dangerous malady; the King seemed deeply affected. For a moment Sophie was so absorbed in the interest of the scene that she



forgot how soon she was to appear upon it; but a tinkling bell was heard, there was the promptor's call, "En place, Messires et Mesdames," the curtain rose, and Sophie stood in the presence of Royalty, the nobility, and the highest intellect of France.

The "Cid," this model piece of Corneille, had for a century maintained its place on the French stage as the grandest expression of all that is noble and tender; the characters are full of dignity and elevation, and it was accepted at once as the first of classical plays; it became a proverb to say, "C'est beau comme le 'Cid.' "* It detracts nothing from the merit of the great dramatist that he took his plot and conception of the piece from a Spanish writer, De Castro, who wrote "Las Mocedades del Cid," (La Jeunesse du Cid); the play had to be adapted to the French stage, for it was essentially Spanish in its nature. The exploits of the Cid, his

* The Spaniards also said, to describe some magnificent object, "Es de Lope."

grand generosity, his indomitable valour, his incorruptible loyalty, his enthusiastic faith ; all these were characteristic of the hero ; he was the noblest expression of Castilian honour. Corneille discovered in the play this secret of his own genius, and that tragic power which he henceforth made his own : admiration for noble sentiments was the feeling he strove to waken, and in doing so he elevated sentiment to the dignity of a passion. By one great effort he attained the summit of his art ; the Spanish characteristics of the original are not entirely omitted, but they are rendered subordinate to the others. Corneille put into practice the principle laid down by Pope, that the object of the stage was,

" To make mankind, in conscious virtue bold,
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold ;"

and in doing this he carried out those principles which were in France considered essential for dramatic success, the unities of action, of time, and place. " *The Cid* " was based on these rules and

confirmed them. He gained one thing from his Spanish studies; the warm colouring, the passionate expression of the South; the language of Chimène and Don Rodrigue sounds in the ear like majestic and noble music. The stage may from time to time be degraded, and low, vulgar natures find their interest in worthless representations, but the great masters of the drama will live in all time.

When Sophie, trembling and nervous, appeared with Elvire in the first scene, a low murmur of approval greeted her. Quick and rapid the French are in all their perceptions, and no nation is more influenced by personal appearance. Since the *début* of Mademoiselle Clairon, no actress had appeared who thus immediately won the approval of the audience. She had so entirely mastered the part that she was able to convey the full force of the genius of the writer, and embody his conception. After the first few words, she ceased to be Sophie Guérin and became Chimène. There was no great applause until the quarrel be-

tween De Gomès and Don Diègue, when the former strikes the latter, the father of Don Rodrigue, to whom Chimène is betrothed; and in the second act, when she foretells the sorrows of the future, she spoke with a passionate energy which found an echo in every heart,


“ Mon cœur outré d’ennuis n’ose rien espérer,
Un orage si prompt qui trouble une bonace
D’un naufrage certain nous porte la menace,
Je n’en saurais douter, je pérís dans le port.

“ Maudite ambition, détestable manie,
Dont les plus généreux souffrent la tyrannie !
Honneur impitoyable à mes plus chers désirs
Que tu me vas coûter des pleurs et des soupirs.”

As she uttered the words, there was a burst of applause, in violation of the rigid etiquette of the French Court, which permitted no expression of approval or otherwise in the presence of the Sovereign. Chimène was well supported, for Monsieur Baron acted Don Rodrigue, and rarely had the part been better

sustained. There are few finer passages in the French language than when Don Rodrigue describes to Don Fernand, the King of Castille, the night attack on the Moors, to which our own literature is indebted for the finest lines in the "Corsair." Don Rodrigue tells how the few followers whom he led, repulsed the thousands of the enemy, and then, when the Moors saw how few were opposed to them, how they rallied and renewed the combat.

" Mais bientôt, malgré nous, leurs princes les rallient,
Leur courage renaît et leurs terreurs s'oublient,
La honte de mourir, sans avoir combattu
Arrête leur désordre, et leur rend leur vertu
Contre nous de pied ferme, ils tirent leurs alfanges,
De notre sang au leur font d'horribles mélanges ;
Et la terre, et le fleuve, et leur flotte, et le port
Sont des champs de carnage où triomphe la mort.
Oh ! combien d'actions, combien d'exploits célèbres
Sont demeurés sans gloire au milieu des ténèbres !
J'allais de tous côtés encourager les nôtres,
Faire avancer les uns et soutenir les autres,
Ranger ceux qui venaient, les pousser à leur tour."



Throughout the description the trumpet gives no uncertain sound. It is a magnificent roll-call of battle, and when King Fernand confers on the conqueror the title of "The Cid," as the


"Généreux héritier d'une illustre famille
Qui fut toujours la gloire et l'appui de Castille."

the enthusiasm was very great, but it culminated when Chimène exclaimed

"Pour conserver ma gloire et finir mon ennui,
Le poursuivre, le perdre, et mourir après lui."

The whole audience rose. In this instance the King gave the signal for the applause, which was renewed again and again. The play was a triumphant success, and after the curtain fell at the last act the audience remained as if spell-bound, awaiting something to complete the effect, and they were not disappointed. The King did not immediately leave the box, but turned to the officer of the guard, who was no other than the Count d'Andore, and gave him some instructions. Little did the performers grouped on the stage imagine what this pause

meant, but suddenly the door leading behind the scenes was opened, and the officer invited Sophie to the royal presence. The excitement of the play had almost exhausted her, and she felt that to appear before the Sovereign, was more than she could bear. For this was the greatest honour that had been conferred on the company since Louis XIV.'s first reception of Molière. Sophie summoned all her courage and took the arm which the young officer offered her, for he saw that she was trembling with nervousness, and, followed by Madame Denain, they passed along the wide corridors, which were lined by the Gardes du Roi in their grand tenue. When Sophie entered the box, she would have thrown herself at the King's feet, but he raised her up, and with his irresistible grace of expression, said, "Mademoiselle, when I see a play so performed, I understand why Corneille is called Le Grand;" he then took a bouquet of flowers, which had been presented him on his entering the theatre, and selecting a rose, gave it to her, and said, "That



which I received from grace and beauty I present to you." The words were unheard by the audience, but they witnessed and appreciated the action. It was one of those graceful scenes which appeal to the heart, and a crowd is always appreciative and sympathetic. A charming picture such as artists love to paint and poets to describe. All the sympathies of the audience were aroused, and one cry of "Vive le Roi!" burst forth. Yes, "Vive le Roi!" in the grand theatre of Versailles! Who could that night have foreseen, what prophet's voice could have foretold, how the same cry, as warm and earnest, would be raised in the reign of his successor and under what different circumstances,* when that beautiful air of

* It was on the memorable 6th October that the banquet was given in the Theatre of Versailles by the Garde du Corps to the Regiment Royal Flandre, which had arrived recently at Versailles. Excited by the repast and enthusiasm, the white rosettes were worn; and when the King and Queen entered one of the boxes with the

of Grétry's "Oh, Richard ! oh, mon Roi, l'univers t'abandonne," would be sung with such pathos as to bring tears to every eye, and that, amid frantic shouts of "Vive le Roi," every sword would be unsheathed in defence of lives so dear to France to protect them from the madness of the people ? On this day the prospect of the future seemed unclouded, and none saw the shadows, clouds, and darkness which rested on it. Now all was light, brightness, and happiness, and none happier than Sophie in the triumph she had won and the sentiment she had evoked.

children, the expressions of affection and devotion were unbounded. It was then the music played, "Oh, Richard ! oh, mon Roi !" and the officers, wild with sympathy, even climbed to the box to touch the King's hand. It was a touching scene of tumultuous loyalty, but attended with most unfortunate results to the Royal family.

CHAPTER XI.

“ Graceful and young, she struck the heart
With every gentle, every winning part.”

IT was truly a great triumph for one so young, and it would not have been surprising if it had created some jealousy among those who, like Mesdemoiselles Clairon and Dumesnil, were at the head of the theatrical profession; but Sophie was so humble and retiring that no such feeling was awakened in any of their minds. On the contrary, the next day the small apartment in the Rue de Paris was thronged with those who came to offer their congratulations, and none were warmer and more sincere than Mademoiselle Clairon's.

But if on this first occasion, at the desire of the Sovereign, Sophie had been permitted to play so important a part, it was not to be so in the future; she was to take the second characters, which were much easier to learn and to enact, for it would have been impossible for her to have sufficient knowledge of the stage to attempt the master-pieces of the great dramatists, and, while her success was undeniable, it was still evident that there was much for her to learn. Youth, beauty, innocence and plaintive sweetness of manner had combined to win the audience, but, as Mademoiselle Clairon urged, to sustain such a success was now the difficulty, and that this could alone be achieved by a severe study of the drama itself.

Among those who now gave her the advantage of their instructions, was Lekain, at this time in the zenith of his fame, a fame which he had conquered against bitter prejudices, for he started with great disadvantages, having a disagreeable enough voice and an ungainly appearance on a stage where nobility of manner and personal

advantages were supposed to be essential to success. Voltaire had advised him to give up the Stage as a profession. "Jouez la comédie pour votre plaisir, mais n'en faites jamais votre état; c'est le plus beau, le plus rare et le plus difficile des talents, mais il est avili par des barbares et proscrit par des hypocrites." But, in spite of this, he had succeeded, and had a short time previously obtained before the King a personal triumph like Sophie's. He was acting the part of Orismane in "Zaïre," and was so much penetrated with it that he forgot the presence in which he was acting, and carried the audience away with himself by his splendid declamation and impetuous passion. "Il m'a fait pleurer, moi qui ne pleure guère," exclaimed the King. The

"Power of thought and magic of the mind"

had transformed the commonplace man into a noble presence.

He who had learned so much and so well was admirably fitted to instruct others, and it was a

great pleasure to Sophie to attend all the rehearsals, to listen to the criticisms, to watch how every action had to be studied, every word distinctly, emphatically expressed. Lekain, like Mademoiselle Clairon, was determined, if it was possible, to have the Stage relieved from the odium cast upon it by the action of the Clergy, and his ideas were expressed in very powerful arguments, carefully drawn up and submitted to the King.

"Is it possible to suppose," he asked, "when day after day, not only the Court, but the Bishops, the Cardinals, the Papal Nuncios, are present at the plays, that they would sanction profane and improper proceedings? When placards are posted at all the corners of the streets, inviting the public to the theatre to see plays performed by the Company supported by the King and styled "Les Comédiens du Roi," are people thus publicly invited to infamous places, or to eat meat on a fast-day?*" Why do

* Most severe penalties were incurred by those who violated the rules of fast days.

not the magistrates punish those who urge others to abuse the authority of our most Christian and Religious Sovereign? I must then conclude that the Theatre is not to be condemned, that the Church, in its high places and in the person of its great dignitaries, is not opposed to the Stage, which is supported by a Prince who rules us with so much wisdom and piety, and who, therefore, if he sanctioned a crime, would be, of all others, the most culpable."

But it was not only on these earnest questions that Madame Denain and Sophie found

" Un arrêt porte que les boucheries de l'Hôtel Dieu vendront seules pendant tout ce carême la viande. 1°. Aux malades qui apporteront certificats de leurs curés ou médecins. 2°. A ceux qui font profession de la religion prétendue réformée en apportant attestation de cette profession ; les contrevenants parmi ces vendeurs seront mis trois heures au careau et emprisonnés jusqu'à Pâques au moins. Peines plus sévères, s'il y a récidive."

Félibien, v. iii. p. 153.

such a charm in this new society, it was in the fund of anecdote, of animation and life, which gave so much geniality and pleasantness to it. Prévile, La Noue, Bellecour were second only to Lekain, while Mesdames Prévile, Dubois and Vestris were equal to sustaining any parts, and they, most of them, possessed the gift of being good raconteurs, so that many a good story and pleasant reminiscence enlivened Madame Denain's select little circle. There was one person who was rarely absent : Count d'Andore. It was not surprising that, when he conducted Sophie to the Royal Box, he did not recognize in Chimène the little flower-girl in whom he had interested himself; but after the play Monsieur Baron told him the accident which had led her to adopt the Stage as a profession, and next day Monsieur Baron informed Madame Denain of the interest which the young officer had shown in her charge, on the occasion of the accident. It was natural for her to wish to thank him, and equally natural for Sophie to feel gratitude towards one to whom, to some extent, she


was indebted for her safety. It would have been wiser and better if the interviews had stopped here; the presence of a brilliant young officer, who, himself, had performed in the plays which Louis XV. frequently had in his private apartment, and who was intimately associated with those who were now the honoured visitors at Madame Denain's, was certainly undesirable. This never occurred to Madame Denain; she only saw in the young Count an agreeable, accomplished member of society. She was told by her friends that, at a time when the royal circle was not conspicuous for its strictness, the Count d'Andore maintained a character respected by all, and that he won the esteem even of those who were inclined to ridicule some of his scruples, and this was sufficient for her; all her attention concentrated on fictitious emotions, she overlooked the fact that there are hearts in which real emotions exist, and moreover that none are so subject to sudden impressions as those whose days are passed in the study of the imagination, of affections and sympathies

as delineated by the great students of the human heart ; nor was the attention of Sophie ever called to the state of her feelings towards the young officer. The days passed swiftly, as happy days always do, for it is only in pain and sorrow that they seem interminable. Now and then pleasant excursions were made, in that simple unexpensive manner which renders the French, in spite of their periodical convulsions, the happiest of nations, as they live for themselves, and not for the opinions of others, and every evening, when there was no performance, they formed a happy circle, from which Count d'Andore was rarely absent.

It may be said that he ought to have remembered that this intimacy was dangerous for a young girl of Sophie's nature ; that he should, in conformity with his high character, have avoided the society of one whose affections he might win, but whom there was little chance, under the exclusive system of the French Noblesse, of his being able to raise to his own class. It is so easy to utter the phrase " ought to have remembered,"

if we all remembered that the consequences of our actions never die, how many more flowers would be strewn not only on our own path, in life, but on the paths of those around us; most unfortunate is it that the warmest-hearted, the most nobly-gifted frequently suffer the most, and make others suffer the most. "Car quand le cœur glisse ou n'arrête pas sur la pente;" in this instance the Count had nothing to guide him, or to warn him of the sorrow he might be creating for the graceful little girl in whom he took so much interest. He was very happy to be relieved from the formal circle of the Court life, which even under the genial and insouciant Louis XV. was still based on rigid etiquette, the rules of which the King had inherited with the Crown, and they were strictly insisted upon by the aristocracy as one of the barriers against the popular feeling which was growing stronger in its expression every day; and they were right, as hereafter "le jour des dupes" was destined to prove.


The gulph that, at this period, separated the aristocracy from the people was a wide one, and the importance attached to these traditions rendered any intermarriage between them rare, and always very difficult ; the Nobles associated with actors, more especially after the great favour shown to the Stage by Louis XIV. ; but this intimacy, while it existed, did not break down the spirit of caste ; the classes mixed together, but were never united ; the Members of the Comédie Française were placed, it is true, in an exceptional position, for they were considered as attached to the person of the Sovereign, at a time when any situation near the King was most highly esteemed ; but the barrier subsisted nevertheless. Count d'Andore never reflected on this, neither indeed did Madame Denain ; as for Sophie, she only knew that she was happy ; her heart was in that state in which nothing in life is permitted long to remain, out of the bud and scarcely in the flower ; she had never learnt to analyze her impressions ; indeed in this consisted to



some degree the fascination she exercised, for self-consciousness is not an ingratiating quality. She saw Count d'Andore arrive with pleasure, and she regretted him when he left, nor did she care to ask herself why, if the evening was fine, they preferred to stand together on the terrace apart from others, and why in his absence she sat alone and thought of him.

It may well be imagined that the Court of Versailles was not exempt from that love of gossip which is the habit of all societies. Sophie had achieved too great a success, and was herself too remarkable for the parties in the Rue de Paris to pass unnoticed, and Monsieur Baron felt it right to tell Madame Denain that the constant presence of the agreeable young officer might be prejudicial to her adopted child; strange it is how one word even carelessly uttered will sometimes throw a new light on all our views, and we fail to comprehend how we could have been so blind to events passing before our eyes. The moment Baron pointed out the danger, and told her that this intercourse was be-

coming a matter of Court gossip, Madame Denain saw the error she had made, and regretted her own want of foresight. For many slight incidents occurred to her which made her fear that Sophie's feelings were at any rate in some degree interested in the Count ; and she could not deny that Monsieur Baron was right, when he said that such a marriage would be impossible, that even if the Marquis de Brionne, one of the proudest and most aristocratic of the French Noblesse, living in the greatest splendour in his feudal castle in the Touraine, if he could have been won by the grace and charm of Sophie and permitted such a marriage for his son, the Court would prevent it, and the King, through the influence of those around him, would refuse his sanction to it. It was one thing to amuse themselves with the society of actors, to attend their receptions, and even to show them the deepest interest and kindness, as in the case of young Molé, who when ill was nursed by the highest ladies of the Court, and attended by the royal physicians ; but when



it came to the question of marriage, the Church itself could not be more intolerant towards the stage. Madame Denain admitted the justice of Monsieur Baron's remarks, and it was determined that on the first opportunity she should tell Sophie that it was undesirable for them to see so much of him whom she regarded as her protector and friend, while perhaps "a dearer name remained behind." Madame Denain was the more anxious that Sophie's mind should remain undisturbed, for it was evident that her health was affected by the life of excitement she had been leading and her hard studies, she had at intervals a sharp cough and complained of pain in her side. The theatrical season was however nearly at an end, and Madame Denain looked forward to the quiet of the cottage at St. Germain as a perfect restorative.

CHAPTER XII.

“ When life is full and free,
Some sudden gloom shall be,
When haughty power mounts high,
The watcher’s axe is nigh.”


A MASIS, the Egyptian monarch, showed his wisdom in withdrawing from his alliance with the tyrant of Samos, because he considered him too fortunate when the beautiful seal which he threw into the sea to propitiate the fates, was restored to him again. There was a deep and painful significance in the skeleton which the Egyptians seated at the table at their most joyous banquets, to teach the guests the instability of human enjoy-

ment; it is well to pray to be protected "in all time of our wealth," even more so than "in all time of our tribulation." When the sails are full and the ship rides gaily over the wave, the sudden blast is most to be dreaded; as Hafiz says, "Every hour of pleasure that you enjoy, count it gain; who can say what will be the issue of an event?" And it is this uncertainty that impresses us with the truth of the remark that "there is no sadder feeling than that which arises from watching the dawn of human joy." Sophie had been supremely and calmly happy; but she had not realized that her happiness was in any way associated with the Count d'Andore.

It had been long before arranged that on the day after Monsieur Baron's conversation with Madame Denain a small party were, by the King's permission, to visit the private rooms of the palace, and he also granted them the grand gallery at the Trianon for a Comédie du Salon and a dance. Madame Denain concealed from Sophie that she had a communication to make

to her which might pain her; little did she think that the events of that day would render any such communication unnecessary. Thus does it so frequently happen that we plan, scheme, and contrive, make the most admirable arrangements to secure our object, and then, “*Deus flavit et dissipatur*,” and all our intentions are frustrated by some unforeseen circumstance.

The party, which were received at the entrance of the private apartments by the attendants with all the consideration which the King was pleased to order should be shown to them, were there joined by the Count d'Andore; he being frequently on duty was enabled to point out those master-pieces of art which Louis XV. had collected, and of the merit of which that monarch was pre-eminently a good judge. It may be remarked that this admirable taste of their sovereigns was much appreciated by the nation, and it was very unfortunate that it was not inherited by Louis XVI. The people liked their kings to be regarded as the first gentlemen



in Europe. After the palace they visited the gardens described by Delille as the—


“ Chef-d’œuvre d’un grand Roi, de Le Nôtre,
Que Louis, la nature et l’art ont embelli.”

Formal enough are these marvellous creations, where swamps and morasses have been transformed into flowery carpets, and the parterres are turned into nature’s drawing-rooms, while the groves represent walls and tapestries, and green alcoves grow so dense that they can shelter against those storms which fail to respect the abode of royalty. The beautiful sculpture of Girardon and Puget, the marble basins, the cascades, the sparkling and rippling of fountains in the sunshine, gave an air of fête to the scene; the hearts of all present responded to it; so Sophie and the young officer felt, as they walked side by side, although not a word which could betray the secret of either was spoken.

They arrived at the Grand Trianon, after a charming morning passed in these pleasant wanderings; at this time there were few spots

more interesting than this small palace, but it has since been eclipsed by the Petit Trianon, now the sanctuary for the souvenirs of Marie Antoinette, which at this date had been just completed. It was of the Grand Trianon that the Duc de Bourgogne exclaimed, "Je vous salue, beau Trianon, plus agréable que tous les jardins fabuleux."

This Château, St. Simon tells us, was scarcely raised to the first floor when Louvois, who had succeeded Colbert as Superintendent of Public Works, was blamed by the King for a defect in one of the windows. Louvois, who was of a rude nature, and whom the King had spoiled, contradicted His Majesty, who the next morning sent for Le Nôtre, and in the presence of Louvois had the window measured, and Le Nôtre gave his decision that the King was in the right. When His Majesty had left the spot, Louvois told the bystanders that, if the King treated an old servant in such a manner on account of a window, it was better to have a war which would prevent his attention being fixed on such trifles. For so



slight a cause France was plunged into the war of 1688. Subsequently Mansard exhausted all the perfection of his art upon the palace, while Le Nôtre planned these admirable paths, woodlands, and flowery glades, amid which generations have wandered with delight. The dance on the present occasion was to take place in the long gallery, which was full of the most prized pictures of that graceful school of French art, of the period when Boucher, Watteau and Le Brun, were privileged to represent the "Cynthias of the Minute," of the Court of France. As this little fête was given to the artistes of the theatre by the King, it may readily be supposed that nothing was wanting in the arrangements to render it enjoyable, and yet there was an absence of animation in the party assembled, although to the casual observer all looked bright and gay.

In daylight entertainments there seems always something wanting. It has been well said, "*Les hommes d'esprit allument leur esprit quand le ciel allume les étoiles.*" Sophie felt depressed, without being able to assign any cause.


The Count d'Andore also seemed anxious. It may have been that the secret which was known to Madame Denain affected her own and Monsieur Baron's manner, for there is nothing more magnetic than a society met for amusement; the nervousness of the one will be felt by all. When they sat down to the festive fête, Monsieur Baron, in general the life of every party, could not avoid thinking of the pain he feared was about to be given to the youngest of the society assembled there; his voice lost its usual charm, and his conversation its brilliancy; yet he little imagined how sudden and sharp the blow was to be.

The first dance was over and the lights were being lit, for, although not late, the sky was overclouded, when two letters were placed in Count d'Andore's hand. As he looked at the writing he changed countenance, for one was from his father, the other from the Minister of State. He opened the Marquis de Brionne's first. It was expressed in language which represented the exclusive dignity of the *ancien régime*.

He said he had been informed that his son, the heir to one of the most ancient peerages in France, was making himself remarkable by his attentions to a young actress of the Comédie Française; and from the high character the young lady bore, he could only suppose that, with the sense of truth and honour he believed the Count to possess, this intimate intercourse was intended to end in marriage; that such an alliance for a house that claimed descent from Royalty and quartered the Fleurs-de-Lys, was impossible; but for the perfect confidence he reposed in the Count's high sense of duty, he would at once have applied to the Minister for a *lettre-de-cachet*, which would have been a just punishment for the folly which had caused the propagation of such reports; as it was, he had made arrangements which would compel the Count to leave Versailles immediately, without creating any further scandal, or causing any reproach to be cast on the illustrious name which he bore. Such was the purport of the letter, which almost fell from his hand; nor was

the other more reassuring. It was from the Minister of State, "De la Maison du Roi." It informed him that for the present His Majesty would dispense with his services about his person, and that he was appointed to escort the Dauphin to the Château de Blois, and to remain there during the Prince's residence. His troop of the Gardes du Corps was to parade the next morning at eleven, the hour fixed for the royal departure. It was a mere formal order, but, received at the same time as the letter from the Marquis, it was evident that the Marquis had been privy to it.

Monsieur Baron was not surprised to remark the Count's agitation, for he had just been informed by some one about the Court of the step which would be taken. After a few moments' reflection, the Count realised the fact that this was the last time he should meet Sophie, and a cold hand seemed to touch his heart. If he desired to say one parting word, there was little time to lose, for already some of the company were leaving. Sophie was standing near the



end of the Orangerie, from which a long terrace extended to the gardens. She was watching the dark clouds which were driven across the sky, when the Count approached. He was unable to speak to her, for others were present; but proposed they should stroll to the end of the terrace. There are moments in life when the heart is full of emotion, and every thought is eloquent; yet the lips seem spell-bound; we cannot give expression to the earnestness within us, we feel the force of the poet's words,

“ Oh! would I could bring to thine ear
The countless sounds that entrance me,
Which only my soul can hear;”

but, no! language will not obey the impulse within. Thus so many seem cold when they are the most deeply moved, and indifferent, when the heart is struggling for expression. They strolled on, and not a word was spoken, until, by a violent effort, suddenly, almost abruptly, he told her that he was to leave on the morrow.

A sudden faintness seized her. She looked up to his face piteously, almost imploringly, and trembled violently.


“You are ill, Mademoiselle.”

“I feel cold,” said the poor child. Yes, she was thinly dressed, and the evening was chill, and, unnoticed by them, drops of rain were falling, but the sudden chill of the heart was the most painful.

There was a seat near; he led her to it. Many impassioned farewell words were about to rush to his lips, when his higher nature prevailed, and he remembered how ungenerous and unworthy it would be to add to the sorrow, if such she felt at parting from him; and even as the words, never to be recalled or unsaid, were struggling for utterance, footsteps were heard approaching, and Madame Denain’s voice calling for Sophie.

She started, as if waking from a trance; Madame Denain was by her side.

“Dear child, why, you are quite wet!” It was true they had not felt that a fine rain had



been falling. "You shiver, Sophie. Run to the house, Count, for a cloak. She trembles all over."

The Count left, and Madame Denain took her own shawl to throw it over Sophie, for it now rained very fast.

Presently not only the Count, but Monsieur Baron and others arrived with cloaks. Sophie was well wrapped up, but trembled so that she had to be supported to the house; and it was Monsieur Baron, and not the Count, who assisted her.

On her arrival there she looked very pale, and had shivering fits. No one could have imagined that this was the bright and sunny face which won on the stage all hearts, even before a word was spoken. The light had deserted the eye, the colour the cheek, for sorrow had cast its shadow across her path, and "her life from out that shadow shall be lifted nevermore."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE carriages were not ready, and although clothes were borrowed from some one of the establishment, and a fire was made in one of the rooms, which Sophie sat by, she still trembled, and her frame seemed to be struck with cold. There is intense sympathy between the inner and outer life; the power of resistance, even to the elements, depends much on the inward energies. Sophie felt that her heart had received a blow which rendered her weak and feeble, and the master-touch of real sorrow had succeeded to the fictitious woes she had been re-

cently enacting. All this she did not explain to herself she only felt a sense of loneliness creep over her ; and could scarcely summon energy to say good night to the friends who were leaving, all anxious about her. She looked timidly round for the one familiar face, but it was not to be seen ; she waited at the carriage-door, almost dreading, while expecting, that he would be there to bid her farewell ; but no, he had left. He had that courage which enables a man to fly, when he cannot overcome his feelings—“and where we fail to conquer, learn to fly.” He felt that his father, although expressing himself in a haughty and despotic manner, was in the right, and that such a marriage was impossible. Truly too late ! but happy he who has not learnt in his own person that evil is done by want of thought as well as want of heart !

“ What ills have been wrought


By the transient desire and the trivial thought.”

There are habits of life so difficult to break through, and when we at last summon

strength to assert our freedom, we hear the fatal words, "It is too late! The tide is rising."

In the carriage, during what seemed a long drive, Sophie nestled to Madame Denain's side, and not a word was spoken. Madame Denain well knew that her sense of discomfort was not purely physical, although she did not realise what an intensity of feeling the young girl possessed; she determined not to claim her confidence unless she originated the subject. Monsieur Baron had told her that the Count was to leave the next morning. Painful as she felt the struggle to be, she was satisfied it was for the best that she should realise the truth at once.

But Sophie was very feverish and still complained of cold; Madame Denain and her trusty maid, Justine, had to carry her to her room, and everything that kindness could suggest was done for her comfort. At last they left, and then, for the first time when alone, Sophie began to recall the happy past. But at least she



had enjoyed the past, that happiness had been hers, great and unalloyed, for how many of us learn when it is too late that we have neglected to appreciate the things that belonged to our peace. What superstitious dreads, idle fears, and an absence of confidence in the future, have destroyed the charm of life, which we might have so gloriously enjoyed, had we only possessed Faith—had we only remembered that on one point all beliefs, Pagan, Christian, have agreed, that to be happy we must live in each day, the highest authority directs us to “be careful for nothing.” “Carpe diem, carpe florem,” exclaim the Latin poets. “Let me really live,” says Anacreon, “give me the power of enjoyment. Truly this is the common sense of life, yet the heart, in the sunniest present, will think of the past or future, and few are heard to say, “Now I am happy.” Sophie had been so, and now came the pang of blighted affections; at last she slept that kind of heavy unrefreshing sleep from which we rise wearied and tired. When she awoke the next morning,

she found Madame Denain by her bed-side ; whose countenance wore an anxious expression, for Sophie's cheek was burning and her shivering fits continued. Nothing seemed to give her warmth ; she herself complained of cold, that word which implies all that is most deathlike and painful.

Very early Madame Denain sent for the doctor, and when he arrived she watched his expression with the utmost anxiety. There was a painful effort in Sophie's breathing during the night that had alarmed her, and which in some degree prepared her for the terrible communication the doctor made to her privately, after a careful examination, that the lungs were dangerously affected. It seemed that the disease was of long standing ; the privations and exposure of her early years had sown the seeds of this terrible malady, which strikes down the most beautiful, which so frequently


“ The opening bud to Heaven conveys,
And bids it blossom there.”

A close observer might long since have noticed

in Sophie's cheek too vivid a colour—the bright flag which consumption waves over the countenance of the doomed. It was a melancholy satisfaction—if such a word can be used in association with great sorrow—for Madame Denain to know that the shock which Sophie's nature seemed to have received was not caused by exposure and her recent exertions; these had only developed the latent evil, which had been insidiously undermining her constitution; but she did blame herself for having paid so little attention to a cough and a hectic glow, which she now recalled, and which certainly should have prevented her undergoing so much fatigue since her first appearance: when Monsieur Baron and Mademoiselle Clairon came the next morning, she frankly expressed her great uneasiness. It was with difficulty that Monsieur Baron could give her any comfort for having advised Sophie to select the stage as a profession, but he very reasonably urged that no one can guarantee the issue of any enterprise; we can only act for the best, and leave the

result to a Higher Power, with whom rest the issues of life and death; that, if we calculated all the possible risks in life, not a heart would dare to beat, not a hand to be clasped in another, not a voice to be raised in joy, for who can say what ills may not be hidden in ambush around us? It is the business of man on earth to be humble in the present as he is ignorant of the future, and to bow before the unknown.


At Sophie's request, she had been left quite alone. It was the first deceit in her life when she said she wanted to sleep again; far otherwise, she wished to listen and to hear the clock of St. Sauveur striking; she did not like to ask Madame Denain what time it was, so sensitive was she lest her slightest emotion should be noticed; so jealous of her inner life and sensations. She had recalled, at first vaguely, and then more distinctly, the events of the past day. She remembered hearing that the Court carriages were ordered at eleven, and soon after Madame Denain had



left the clock struck. She hurriedly threw a shawl over her, and went to the window, concealing herself behind the light curtain. It was a bleak, cold, grey day; heavy rain was falling; there was little movement in the street—a painful contrast to the sunniness and joyousness of the day before, fitly representing the contrast between her past and present frame of mind. Presently she saw the few loiterers turn and look in the direction of the palace, while others were running from the side streets, and stood at the edge of the pavement to see the royal carriage as it passed. Two or three travelling-coaches and fourgons preceded that of the Dauphin, the postillions making the streets echo with the cracking of their whips. A detachment of the Cent Suisses headed the *cortége*; these were to return from the Barrier, but the Gardes de Corps, who were to form the escort as far as Blois, with orders to remain there on duty during the residence of the Dauphin, immediately followed the royal carriage, the officers were riding on each


side. They wore their long white cloaks, and the plumes of the helmets drooped in the rain, which now poured down in torrents; their high boots and heavy accoutrements gave indications of a long journey. On the right of the carriage rode the Count d'Andore. So soon as Sophie recognised him, she withdrew her head, but not quickly enough to prevent his seeing her, for his eyes were fixed on the window. It was a momentary glance, an inclination of the head, and the *cortége* had swept by, and the clatter of the troops, the whips of the postillions, and the rattle of the carriage-wheels died away in the far distance.

Madame Denain feared that the noise might have awakened Sophie, and when she went to her room, she found her, with her shawl wrapped round her, lying on the bed, almost inanimate, as if a sudden blow had struck her. It needed no explanation. The sad truth was only too apparent, and with real kindness Madame Denain carefully refrained from any allusion to the Count d'Andore. Sophie remained all the



day in a nervous and sometimes excited state, and when the doctor returned in the evening, his report was very unfavourable. Although the state of her feelings was scarcely suspected among her associates in the theatre, the interest which she awakened was very great. The King, on hearing of her illness, sent his own physician to see her, who confirmed the worst apprehensions of Dr. Voisin. The only wish Sophie expressed was to return to Saint-Germain. The noise of the Rue de Paris, and the constant tramp of the passing troops, recalled the past too vividly to her. The next day she was a little stronger and less agitated, and the doctors, when they saw her, were of opinion that, if she continued to improve, she might be moved in a day or two. This was a great relief to Sophie. When we have felt unhappy in any place, we seek for comfort in change, and too frequently seek in vain. Still Saint-Germain was sunnier, fresher, more cheerful than the Rue de Paris, and the associations with Versailles had lost their charm; the

rose tints of the past had changed to the hues of fallen leaves, and so one evening the small party of old friends met in the little *salon* for the last time—the last time; for although all spoke of the future, sometimes with confidence, some who were present were fully aware that they could scarcely hope to meet again the young girl they had so much loved and cherished. It is always a solemn event when any act is performed for the last time—the simplest last words of those we are parting with, the last drive or walk amid the scenes we have loved, and, as in the present instance, the last of meetings with dear friends when her young life seemed only a few days before to herself, and to all around her, so full of hope and promise.



CHAPTER XIV.

MADemoiselle CLAIRON'S devotion to her pupil was untiring; as the theatrical season had closed she accepted Madame Denain's offer to pass the summer at St. Germain. This was a great satisfaction to Sophie, for this great actress possessed the warmest heart and kindest sympathies. She was much attached to Sophie, and she blamed herself for having so strongly urged her to make choice of the stage; although it became every day more evident that no mode of life would have arrested the progress of the disease, and this seemed to be felt by the poor child; for when words of encouragement were

spoken in her presence, and plans for the future were entertained, her face would be lit by a pale incredulous smile, and a tear would course down her cheek. She was very young to die, with her life unfulfilled ; and this distress was the more deeply felt by the kind hearts near her, for it was now the month of July, and nature was so joyous with the charm of sunshine, so warm that on an evening Sophie was frequently carried to the terrace, and listened to the murmur of the city, watching the shadows as the declining day shed its purple hues on tower and palace, on the forest, and the ripples of the Seine. She never, even to Mademoiselle Clairon, mentioned the affection which had grown upon her so imperceptibly ; only one day she expressed the hope that the dead in a future existence, may watch over and protect those they have loved on earth.

“ I am sure they do so,” said Mademoiselle Clairon, “ that when those we love die, we are never separated from them ; although they are not present to our sight. There is only one

separation which endures, the separation of the heart."

" ' When voices lose the charm which shed
A tenderness o'er all they said,
Till slowly passing, one by one,
The sweetnesses of love are gone.'

When we have parted in true and loyal affection with another, that affection will for ever exist even although we should be separated by death. The husband, the friend, the companion of childhood never die to us. We never lose those we love; they are the spirits that watch over us; as Monsieur de Rancé said, when dying, ' *Mes frères, je ne fais que vous précéder.*' If you have loved anyone, and he has been, or should be parted from you, you will meet him again. Whoever dies in the Faith of a great affection assures its immortality."

On another occasion, Sophie asked Mademoiselle Clairon if she believed in Spirits.

" As I have already said," she replied, " I feel convinced that those with whom we have been

associated by ties of deep sympathy, by the communion of heart, are with us in the spirit after death, if not in person. I have, in my own life, seen strange events occur. One to whom I was deeply attached died, and whom, for certain reasons, I had refused to see shortly before his death; and some time after, while I was at a party, in the midst of the festivities, there was a sudden cry, which everyone who was present heard, and which I recognised as the voice of him who was once very dear to me; for many months the same cry was repeated at certain intervals.”* No doubt, in our profession, the imagination is greatly exercised, and it is calculated to render us what people call superstitious and credulous; but I regard the imagination as a link between the visible and invisible world. God never bestowed on us the deep sense of beauty, the warmth of affection, the longing for sympathies, the love and appreciation of so many objects, animate and inanimate, if, when we pass

* See Appendix.

away, they are all to cease to exist for us. This connection, which I believe subsists between the Present and the Future, strengthens all my deepest convictions and confirms my Faith. Faith is the highest of blessings. Doubt the depth of misery."

One morning, when Madame Denain entered Sophie's room earlier than usual, she was surprised to see her with a higher colour, and her eyes sparkling with animation.

"I have had such a delightful dream," she said; "it seemed to me that I was travelling far away in a most beautiful country, and the sky was radiant in its glory, and I felt so happy that I was almost sorry to awake. I wonder if it was a dream, maman, or a vision of the future? If so, it would be a blessing, for I am sometimes so weak that I think I must be dying. Is it not so, maman?"


There was a pause.

"I have thought, maman, that it would be terrible to die without the sacraments of the Church, and yet I know that the priest is for-

bidden to administer the sacraments to any actor or actress; I hoped to have lived until this cruel law was abolished; I feel it is not to be so, but I will not abjure the profession I adopted so recently, and stigmatize those who have been most kind and good to me, I am sure that would be evil in the sight of God, that God who loves us all."

But happily this harsh law was not always obeyed, Madame Denain saw the curé of St. Germain; he was a man of great distinction, and superior to these prejudices, and it was a blessing for which Sophie was truly grateful to learn that, at the risk of incurring the displeasure of his superiors, he would administer to her the sacraments of the Church.

And after this sad ceremony, when Mademoiselle Clairon and Madame Denain also partook of the rite, Sophie was calm and even happy; but visibly sinking, her repose was that of perfect peace, she was gently sliding away. One evening, so genial and balmy was the air that carefully wrapped up she was



carried to the terrace. A basket of flowers was placed by her, and her thin hands entwined them into the form of a cross; it was just completed when it fell on her bosom, emblem of her faith, and beauty, that with the sunset passed away.

CHAPTER XV.

“ The moon breaks forth—one silver stream of light
 Glides from its font in heaven along the night,
 Flows in still splendour through the funeral gloom
 Of years—and wonders as it clasps the tomb
 Through the calm glory, hosts as calm above,
 Look on the grave—and by the grave is Love.”

YES, there was much love, the love of tender
 kind hearts around that grave, consecrated
 by affection, and not by the Church ; every
 effort of all those illustrious by their merits and
 talents was unable to induce the Archbishop of
 Paris, even in the case of this young, innocent,
 well-loved child, to reverse the decree of excom-

munication. She was buried in the small flower-garden at the end of the terrace, where she had passed so many happy hours; the members of the Company were present; Monsieur Baron read the prayers, and all wept as they knelt by the grave where now a marble cross records the name of the little flower-girl.*

* In a letter of Talma's to Charles Young upon my Uncle John's death, he begs to be numbered among the subscribers to the monument about to be erected to Mr Kemble in Westminster Abbey; adding the touching remark: "Pour moi je serai heureux si les prêtres me laissent enterrer dans un coin de mon jardin."—" *Record of a Girlhood*," Vol. I. p. 106. By Frances Anne Kemble.

APPENDIX.



THE FRENCH STAGE

AND

THE CHURCH.

MADemoiselle CLAIRON had said with truth that it would be the great object of her life to relieve the profession of the Stage from the odium cast upon it by the decrees of the Church, which, however, as we have seen, never affected public opinion, for all the eminent performers of that time, whenever they appeared on the scene, were crowned with the public welcome as with flowers. Their pictures, busts, and engravings were bought with avidity; it was even proposed to have a medal struck with the

portrait of Mademoiselle Clairon, which was to be worn as a decoration. She received magnificent offers from the Emperor of Russia, through the Princess Galitzin, if she would make St. Petersburg her residence; the same Princess had her portrait painted by the celebrated painter, Carle Van Loo, in which she is represented as Medea borne through the air in a car with flying dragons. When Louis XV. saw the picture, he declared that no one should possess it but himself; he had it magnificently framed, and hung in his own room with those portraits which he prized the most; at the same time he had it engraved, and made the plate a present to Mademoiselle Clairon, when the sale of the proofs produced a large income. On another occasion, when, in a fit of discouragement, she expressed her intention of retiring from the stage, the Duc de Choiseul and M. de Labord, the banker of the Court, sent, by order of the King, sixty thousand francs to her notary, desiring to know how she would like them placed, only expressing the King's earnest hope

that she would reconsider her determination. Well might this high appreciation on the part of the King, the Court, the Magistracy, and all the great masters of literature and art, render more intolerable the censures of the Church, while painful scenes at the graves of dear friends where, if anywhere, animosity should be buried, added personal bitterness to the public scandal. Mademoiselle Clairon said herself, "She felt she had a right to be honoured by the Church as well as by the State, that there was nothing grander or nobler in the arts than to be a great tragedian, and yet they were subjected to excommunication, in opposition to all public feeling, and to the sentiments of humanity." The digests and canons of the Church were invoked against them, though at the period when they had been originally fulminated against the theatre, the Stage was very differently managed from what it was in the time of Louis XV. But a great crisis arose.

In 1761, a lawyer named Hulsuc de la Motte, who warmly sympathised with these views, un-

dertook to promote them by a very rash attack on the Church; he published a work entitled "The Liberty of France against the Arbitrary Power of Excommunication," in which the advocate endeavoured to prove that there was no legal power of excommunication; he cited authorities in his favour, quoted opinions of eminent lawyers, and concluded with a severe attack on the clergy, and a great deal about independence and the liberties of Frenchmen.

It was premature by thirty years, when it would have been crowned in the *Assemblée Nationale*, and the author invited to the honours of the *séance*; but even the good-tempered insouciant King was not prepared to have the pæans of freedom sung near the palace. As for the clergy, they would, if they could, have condemned the author to the fate of *Damiens*; the public feeling, which until now had sympathized with the Stage, was roused against it; men were startled at this wild shriek for freedom, which seemed to exceed the necessities of the case—the result was that the work was

denounced by M. le Daim, the bâtonnier of the Bar, and that by the order of the Court. Monsieur Joly de Fleury, on the 29th April, 1761, in the presence of a crowded court demanded that the book should be burned by the public executioner in the court of the Palais de Justice, which sentence was carried out; and M. Hulsuc de la Motte's name was struck off the list of the Order of Advocates.

Unfortunately for Mademoiselle Clairon, the author had printed a note to his objectionable work, expressing his gratitude to her, "for her generous and noble support in this great cause," and thus even her great popularity was overclouded for a short time; but in a few months the work was forgotten, only no advance had been made in the desired object of the profession. It was then that an event occurred which, as it crowned the capital of this injustice, decided this distinguished performer to retire from the Comédie Française.


A very inferior actor, named Dubois, had been guilty of perjury to evade the payment of a

just debt. He affirmed that the money had been paid, and induced a companion, named Blainville, to declare that he was present when the money was paid. The plaintiff's advocate, instead of bringing forward counter-evidence, urged that the testimony of either of them was inadmissible, as their profession had been declared infamous by law. The other members of the Company were so indignant at this plea that they prevented the case from coming into Court, by themselves paying the whole amount due, and at the same time expelled from the Society the two members who they were persuaded had told a falsehood. The dismissal of Blainville was of no moment, but Dubois was in a more important position, and he had a daughter remarkable for her beauty, who had been indebted to Mademoiselle Clairon for her instructions in declamation, and who played frequently before the Court in graceful, although subordinate, parts; she was sent by Dubois to the Duc de Richelieu, and made use of her dramatic powers to some purpose, when, subdued by her en-

treaties and tears, the great Minister ordered the Comédie Française to reinstate her father. These occurrences took place during the Holy Week in April, 1765, when a piece called "The Siege of Calais," a tragedy, by Dubelloy, had just appeared, in which Dubois had played the part of Maury; but when he was expelled an actor, Bellecour, replaced him.

Dubois' daughter had maliciously kept secret the Minister's order, and she only showed it at the last moment, when a great disturbance was the consequence. The celebrated actor, Monsieur Lekain, declared that he would not appear on the stage with Dubois. Brizard, Molé, Dauberval, who all had parts, left the theatre. Mademoiselle Clairon pleaded illness. All this time the theatre was filling, until at last every part of the house was crowded to see the famous piece. The hour for commencing had long passed, and there was no sign of the curtain rising. The audience became impatient. At last it rose, to show a few of the inferior actors, who explained the

state of affairs as well as they could, and offered to perform some other piece which did not require such an array of talent; but this did not satisfy the audience, who were frantic. "They are the comedians of the King," they exclaimed, "and refuse to obey the Royal commands; send them all to prison!" "Where is the guard?" "They are too insolent, this royal company; prison will do them good!" In fact, it became a great demonstration of loyalty, and the Company were accused of treason. After two hours of this tumult, the guards lined all the passages and exits of the theatre, and the curtain fell, but the delinquents had left. In the middle of the night, four of the actors were seized and carried to the prison of the Fort l'Evêque. Mademoiselle Clairon was not arrested until the next morning, and she was kept there four days, when she was released from her prison, but was sentenced to seclusion for three weeks; but, strange contradiction! during her short term of imprisonment, she received every attention from the Court, and all




the most illustrious and distinguished persons of the realm. And yet she had to submit to this gross indignity. It was on this occasion that Voltaire wrote to her:—

“L’homme qui s’intéresse le plus à la gloire de Mademoiselle Clairon et à l’honneur des beaux-arts, la supplie très-instamment de saisir ce moment pour déclarer que c’est une contradiction trop absurde d’être au Fort l’Evêque si on ne joue pas, et d’être excommunié si on joue; qu’il est impossible de soutenir ce double affront. Les acteurs, qui ont marqué tant de sentiment, d’honneur dans cette affaire, se joindront sans doute à elle. Que Mademoiselle Clairon réussisse ou ne réussisse pas, elle sera révérée du public.”

Her indignation determined her, in opposition to all the entreaties, even of those who had recently treated her so ill, to retire from the Stage, but she waited until the Comédie Française recommenced its representations, and then she publicly announced her intention, denouncing at the same time the cruelty with which the Company was treated by the Ecclesiastical

authorities; and she carried out her intention, in spite of all the efforts of her friends to induce her to reconsider it. Even the King condescended again to urge her to remain, and His Majesty doubled the subvention, and paid the debts of the Company, which amounted in 1758 to 270,000 francs; she was only forty-two years of age and in the fulness of her powers; but the ignominy with which she had been treated, she said, "m'avait fait trop sentir la pesanteur, le danger et l'avilissement de mes chaînes, pour que je consentisse à les porter plus longtemps; je me devais de plus une vengeance; ma retraite me parut la seule honnête pour moi, elle satisfait à tout d'autant mieux que, n'ayant que quarante-deux ans, il m'était permis de compter sur quelques regrets."

Mademoiselle Clairon now set herself to work to achieve the entire enfranchisement of the French Stage from the ban of the Church. Pamphlets were written on the subject, and even High-Churchmen desired that an ecclesi-



astical council should be called to reverse these acts of excommunication. The arguments adduced by the supporters of the Stage were unanswerable, and from time to time the enforcement of the law was set aside, but it was never abolished; and, strange to say, that even during the French Revolution the same laws prevailed, although this may have arisen from the entire indifference to any Church; but these decrees were never distinctly rescinded until so recently as the year 1849, when the Provincial Council, held at Rheims, suppressed by a special act the censure passed by the Gallican Church on the theatrical profession, this decision being formally ratified at Rome the following year. From this time the Church in France has seen that the Stage is only second to itself in influence, and during the many changes of dynasties and parties the State has endeavoured by a generous support to direct that influence into a beneficent direction.

MADemoisELLE CLAIRON AND THE SPIRIT.

THE account which Mademoiselle Clairon gives of the spirit by which she was haunted is so remarkable that it is worth narrating in her own words :

“Two years and a half had elapsed since my last parting with Monsieur de S——, and the death of my beloved friend. He sent, on his death-bed, to beg I would come and see him, but I had not the courage for such an interview, so he died, having with him at the time only his servant and an old woman who nursed him. He then resided in the Rue Basse du Rempart, near the Chaussée d’Antin.


I lived in the Rue de Bussy, near the Rue de Seine and the Abbey Saint-Germain. My mother and a few friends were supping with me. My usual circle consisted of a superintendent of the Menus Plaisirs, whose services I constantly required in my arrangements with the Gentlemen of the Chamber; an actor in one of the minor theatres, named Roseby, and a limited circle of friends. Our little suppers at this date were infinitely gayer than the most brilliant fêtes have been for the last twenty years. I had just finished singing some pretty little airs, which were much applauded, when, as the clock struck eleven, a cry of anguish was heard. Its painful expression and prolongation alarmed everyone. I was seized with such an emotion that I fainted away.

“Some present at first thought that it was a trick in which I was playing a part, and that even my fainting was mere acting; but my paleness and trembling, the tears which I shed, the earnestness with which I entreated

some of the party to pass the night with me, proved my sincerity. We discussed what it could possibly be, and it was resolved to place a watch in the street, in case it was repeated the next night.

“It was so; all my people, my friends, my neighbours heard the same cry, and always at the same hour, under my windows; nor was it possible for me to imagine that it was intended for any other than myself. I rarely supped out, but whenever I did so the cry was never heard, yet frequently on my return it would burst forth in the midst of us. Once when the President B——, with whom I had been supping, conducted me home, to protect me from any danger, as he was bidding me good night at my door, the cry sounded between us. He was aware of this painful shriek haunting me, and yet was so overcome he was put into his carriage more dead than alive.

“On another occasion, I requested Roseby to accompany me to the Rue Saint Honoré,



to choose some stuffs, and afterwards to Mademoiselle de Saint P——, who lived near the Porte Saint Denis. The one topic of our conversation was my ghost (as it was now called). A young man who was there, an entire disbeliever in supernatural causes, begged me to call up the spirit; either from weakness or from bravado, I did as he requested, and immediately the cry was repeated three times. It sounded more terrible than ever. We managed to return to the carriage, but on our arrival at my house both of us had fainted.

“Once all the company of the Comédie Française had been ordered to Versailles. We were to pass three days there. Sufficient accommodation had not been provided, and Madame Grandval could not find an apartment. I offered to have another bed put in my bed-room for her. She accepted, and we went to bed. As my maid was undressing, for she had to sleep in the same room, I said, ‘Here in the country, we are out of the way of my ghost, and it is such a stormy night, the voice will never find me.’

At that moment the shriek was heard, Madame Grandval thought the house was possessed by demons. She started up in her night-dress, and endeavoured to rush out of the place, but returned to the room still more alarmed by the stillness and darkness without. But none closed their eyes in the house that night.

“Seven or eight days afterwards, as the usual society was in my *salon*, when the clock struck eleven, a gun was fired at my window. We saw the flash, but the window was not broken. Everyone thought it was an attempt on my life, and that it was necessary to take precautions. The Superintendent went at once to Monsieur de Marville, the Lieutenant of the Police. All the houses near my own were searched. The next night, police were placed in the houses near, and others were stationed in the street, but again the same explosion was heard, although no one was able to trace where the shot was fired from.

“I at last grew accustomed to these annoy-



ances, and it evidently was not intended to do me any harm. I ceased to occupy myself with them. One night, it being unusually warm, I opened my window, and with the Superintendent was leaning over the balcony, when suddenly a shot was fired, and both of us fell into the room and lay motionless. When we recovered from our swoon, it was found that each of us had received a severe blow on the face; the day following Mademoiselle Dumesnil invited me to a little fête that she gave in her house at the Barrière Blanche. I started with my maid at eleven o'clock; the moon shone brightly as we drove along the Boulevards; as we passed by the house, my maid asked me: 'Is it not here that M. de S— died?'


" 'Yes!' I replied, 'according to the information I have received, it must have been one of these two houses.'

"As soon as I had uttered the words, from one of them a shot was fired; it passed through our carriage. The coachman, thinking that we were attacked by robbers, drove furiously. We

arrived at Mademoiselle Dumesnil's trembling with alarm. But after this I was left at peace for some time.

"Some time elapsed, and I took a small house in the Rue des Marais. I was told that Racine had resided there forty years, that it was there he composed his immortal works, that Adrienne Lecouvreur had also lived and died there. The very walls of the house seemed to my imagination to be imbued with poetry and talent. One day an aged lady called on me, and said she had some very important communication to make. She commenced by telling me she never went to plays, and therefore never had the opportunity of seeing me.

"'You see, Mademoiselle,' she added, 'that I am very agitated. I was the intimate friend of M. de S—, and the only person he would see the last year of his life; we passed hours in speaking of you;' and she then asked, with her eyes full of tears, why I refused to see him when he was dying? I told her, because I was sure it would have given him too much pain, but I



hoped, as she had been a friend of Monsieur de S——, that she did not condemn me for this. ‘Condemn you, no!’ she replied, ‘for we only owe such an obligation to our relations, or our benefactors, and I am aware that you owed him no gratitude, and he well appreciated this fact, but his excitement of character overmastered his judgment, and I am pained to tell you that your declining to see him accelerated his end. He counted every minute, always expecting you, in spite of your message. When, at half-past ten at night, his servants entered and told him that you persisted in your refusal, he took my hand, and with a cry of agony exclaimed, ‘She is cruel! too cruel! But she will gain nothing by this. I will pursue her after my death, as I have pursued her through life.’

“I need not tell you, my dear friend, what an effect these words had on me; the coincidence of all these extraordinary manifestations with this terrible expression filled me with distress and alarm. I felt as if all my life I was doomed to this torture; but not so, from this moment

I heard nothing more. Here is a true history as it occurred; people may call this a coincidence, or chance, all I feel is that what men call chance may be the secret influence that directs this world."

REFLECTIONS
OF
MADEMOISELLE CLAIRON.

I.

MON état habituel est la souffrance. Je vois que c'est celui de la plus grande partie de l'humanité, mais toujours, je crois, plus à plaindre que moi. Il faut donc m'armer de patience et de raison, être sobre, mesurer mes forces, borner mes désirs, espérer tout du temps, de mon courage, de ma vanité même, et pour me consoler de ce que je souffre, songer à tout ce que je ne souffre pas.

II.

Autant qu'il me sera possible, je dois dérober à toutes les personnes que je vois, la connaissance de mes infirmités, et surtout de mes chagrins. Tout est égal aux indifférens ; les sots font des commentaires, les méchans triomphent ; l'amitié s'afflige ; et chez ces derniers mêmes, l'ennui, le dégoût suivent de près la compassion. Je n'ai presque jamais retiré de mes plaintes que des airs inutiles ou des convictions déchirantes.

Il faut donc tâcher d'acquérir assez de grandeur, de courage pour suffire seule à mes peines, et pour ne montrer chez les autres et chez moi que les agrémens qui peuvent me faire désirer.

III.

Je ne dois jamais oublier que je suis née dans l'obscurité la plus profonde ; en murmurer serait un crime ; en rougir, une sottise. Tout ce que je puis est de réparer cette volonté du sort par la douceur, l'honnêteté, l'égalité d'humeur, les

connaissances de l'esprit et les vertus de l'âme.

IV.

On fait toujours un crime à celui qui n'a ni naissance ni fortune.

V.

Ne pas faire tout le bien qu'on peut dans ce monde c'est être ingrat envers l'humanité. Qu'importe la reconnaissance ? C'est assez de pouvoir se dire : il est un malheureux de moins ! et peut-être mon cœur trop tendre n'aurait pu suffire si j'en avais trouvé que des reconnaissans. Mais je crois qu'il est nécessaire de ne jamais aller plus loin qu'on n'en est requis ; comme on ne peut pas tout, il ne faut pas s'ôter les moyens de venir au secours d'un autre. La nature ne donne pas la même élévation à toutes les âmes ; il en est peu d'assez nobles pour sentir tout le charme de la reconnaissance, et

toutes celles qui ne le sentent pas sont nulles ou possédées par l'envie. Plus on fait pour elles, plus on les imite, et c'est manquer également de prudence et d'humanité que de mettre les hommes en état de devenir des méchans.

VI.

Il faut donner sans rien prétendre; ne rien recevoir au-dessus de ce qu'on donne. Recevoir en pur don est sûrement la plus grande preuve de respect et d'attachement qu'on puisse donner, puisque c'est engager son opinion, sa délicatesse et sa liberté. Si celui qui donne est estimable, si c'est de considération ou d'amitié qu'il vous oblige; s'il vous plait de croire qu'en recevant vous lui prouvez d'attachement, de regret ou estime, il faut accepter sans doute, et regarder comme un grand bien de pouvoir s'abandonner aux doux sentimens de la reconnaissance.

VII.

C'est presque sans réfléchir sur elles que nous accumulons nos années; la douce prévention ou la pauvreté de ceux qui cherchent à nous plaire, la délicatesse de nos amis, l'aveuglement de notre vanité, nous empêchent d'apercevoir chaque jour le ravage que chaque jour amène. D'illusion en illusion, nous arrivons au terme de la vie, ne laissant souvent après nous qu'un triste souvenir de nos égaremens et de nos ridicules prétentions. Il doit être une façon d'exister convenable à chaque âge; la nature, prévoyante et bonne, a dû songer à nous procurer les plaisirs et les dédommagemens de tous les temps, et la raison doit nous défendre d'en prétendre d'autres.

Je jouirai d'une façon douce de tout ce que je pourrai me trouver de méritant; je ferai l'impossible pour réparer ce que j'aurai fait de répréhensive.

Détruire mes défauts, former mon âme à la vertu, la rendre supérieure à tous les événemens, mériter toujours que je me pardonne et m'estime

moi-même, voilà, je crois, les moyens les plus sûrs de me faire supporter et, peut-être, chérir ma solitude. Le repos du corps et la paix de l'âme, des livres, des réflexions, l'attention suivie de rendre heureux tout ce qui m'entoure, me feront achever ma vie sans impatience sur sa durée, et, j'ose l'espérer, sans faiblesse sur sa perte. A mon âge et dans ma position, voilà sûrement ce que je peux devenir de mieux ; je m'y tiendrai.

VIII

Pour remplir le devoir que la raison m'impose, pour être en état de me juger moi-même, je dois donc remonter aux principes de tout.

Que suis-je ? Qu'a-t-on fait ? Qu'ai-je ?



STUDIES FOR THE STAGE.

MADemoiselle CLAIRON has left a formidable list of the studies required for the stage.

After Dancing she places Drawing.

“All actors,” she says, “should be able to draw, they would then find it easier to understand how characters should be grouped on the stage; the picturesque, which is essential to every scene, would then be studied in the attitudes and in the costumes; in great scenic effects, the groups and masses would be properly disposed; but if an actor has not studied drawing then he should consult the best painters and sculptors.”


Music.

“If not deeply studied, the first principles of it should be understood, so as to know the compass of the voice, to render its expression easier, to be able to moderate, to sustain, and vary the tone, and to give to plaintive expressions the modulation which they require.

“Without this knowledge it is impossible to act Corneille, it would be incurring the evil of appearing exaggerated or undignified.”

Language, Geography, and Literature.

“A study of our language is most important, for the theatre should be the school for strangers. It is inconceivable that anyone should attempt to represent the great masters of the nation and not have studied the force of every expression; he who does not know the value of words cannot know the value of the ideas they represent, and I do not comprehend how it is that MM. les Gentilshommes de la Chambre




accept, and how the public tolerate those who it is evident are ignorant of the first principles of our language.”

“ You cannot pretend to give an opinion on a great historic drama without a knowledge of history and geography. An acquaintance with stage rules, a keen sense of hearing, good sense, and a mind attentive, clear, and intelligent are not sufficient. History, geography, and dramatic composition, ancient and modern, all kinds of poetry, must be well known before it is possible to judge whether an author has mastered all the circumstances and incidents connected with the characters which he represents. After all Corneille, Racine, Voltaire must submit their works to the judgment of actors, and, indeed, where could they find any more impartial tribunal ?”

THE STAGE AND THE PEOPLE.


THE influence of the stage on the character and morals of the people has latterly attracted much public attention, and at the last meeting of the Church Congress the Rev. the Earl of Mulgrave in a most powerful address urged the claims of the Stage on the sympathies of the Church.

“The theatres, offering satisfaction to a taste which is in its own nature perfectly pure, may surely be declared a most important agent in the education of a people. What other form of popular recreation is possessed of such wonderfully teaching powers as the stage? I speak of it now in its purity, as it ought to be, not as




it is. It has two voices by which it appeals to the human heart and life—tragedy and comedy. Through tragedy it excites towards the attainment of the highest virtues, whilst it warns against the spurious attractions of evil. The tenderest emotions are provoked, sympathy stimulated and taught, the inner man braced up to play a noble part in the great drama of every-day life. Through comedy the follies and vices of a present age are held up to ridicule and scorn, the absurdities of a pampered society exposed to contempt, and so warned against imitation.

“It is no argument against what is in its own essence virtuous, the fact of its having become vicious. It may be surely admitted that these two great literary and dramatic powers of tragedy and comedy have been perverted in a degree by the theatre, and yet not on that account should the theatre be declaimed against as a moral, and therefore social evil. An organ or other musical instrument, quite perfect in its construction, can-



not logically be charged with that awful discord which the fingers of an utterly unmusical person may have caused. Blame the ignorance and unscientific touch of the player, but exonerate the instrument. Vice and buffoonery, the children of a depraved public taste, may disgrace dramatic art, but not on that account is the drama to be decried against.

“ There have been those amongst our English actors and actresses who have elevated the science of the drama; who have exercised its beneficial powers, and made its moral impression felt on the heart. There are those in the present day, I believe, who honestly strive to obtain for the stage what the stage has, through its own insincerities, been denied—the Church’s sympathy. It is an easy matter, but I doubt its fairness, to blame the actor for the abuses of his profession. What has the Church done? Condemned, abused, denounced the theatres in councils, sermons, tracts, and platform addresses. But what has she done



towards its moral reform? And will history allow it to be said that she has done nothing because she has diligently and carefully inquired into the matter, and that the drama is in its essence an evil? Even if history would allow this, I dare to say that on its pages there is no record—no, and there never will be such a record—of its being the Church's duty, when brought face to face with evil, to leave that evil to become evil even to itself.

“I would advocate, on the part of the Church towards the stage, a sympathy which, whilst it is tender, shall be true. There must be no lowering by the Church of her standard to that of the world. Where she recognises a recreation as beneficial, let her, through her laymen, adopt it for her children's advantage. This work of theatrical reform is a special work for the godly layman; one that will be found to require the greatest prudence, the nicest tact, the quickest discrimination—the employment of all the talents of a true gentle-
